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Gates on Games

WORLD
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INTERVIEW
9-page special
feature

Is **Microsoft** planning to take over
the game industry? And what the
hell does **Bill Gates** know about
videogames, anyway? Page 6

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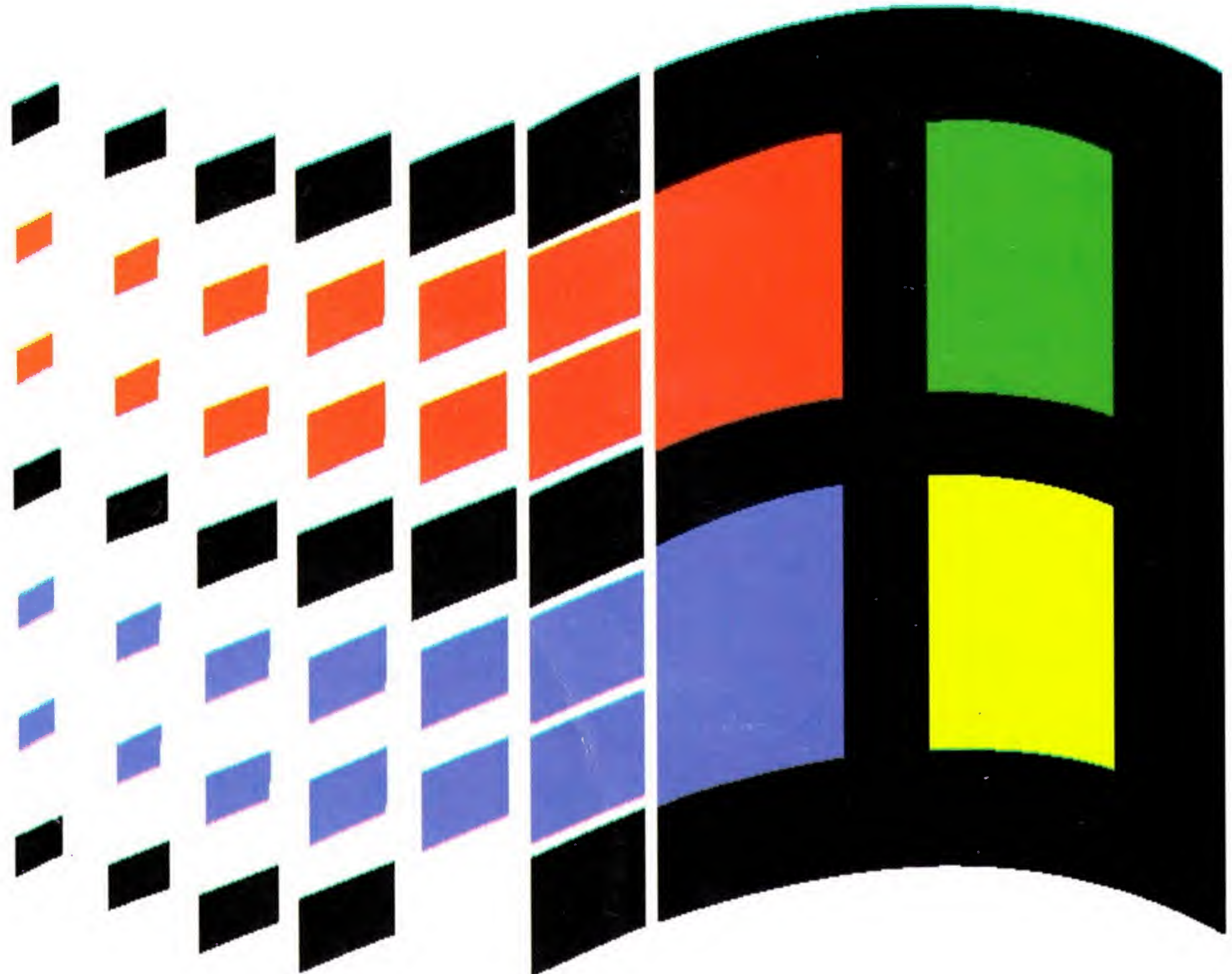
In his first interview with a game magazine, Bill Gates reveals the strategy behind Microsoft's increased focus on the game market. Oh, and he also has a few things to say about Sega, Sony, and Nintendo...

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DVD: Digital Video Disc is coming to a game machine near you. Are you ready for it?



PCs versus Consoles

Are PCs and consoles in competition? Some people say yes, **Bill Gates says no**. Either way, any discussion of **Microsoft's Windows 95** initiative — designed to make playing games on a PC more like playing videogames on a console — always acts as a catalyst for debate.

As a household necessity, the PC's **popularity has rocketed**. Initially fueled by the dream of **“multimedia,”** and now boosted further by the lure of **Internet access**, the PC continues to make inroads into our homes. Games are then invited to follow, or **sneak in through the back door**. Wherever there is a PC, you will be sure to find a **PC game** on it.

But there are equally **compelling reasons** why dedicated, low-cost (relatively, at least) **game machines** will continue to **thrive**:

- **Price:** \$2,000 versus \$200? The smart money always bets low
- **Dedicated Circuitry:** A jack of all trades can never compete with a master of one (especially when playing on the master's home turf)
- **TVs vs. Monitors:** Do you want to play in the living room or the home office?
- **Motivation:** Not one hardware company is betting its whole future on PC games. Sega and Nintendo have everything to lose
- **The arcade connection:** *Ridge Racer* or *Virtua Fighter 2*? No matter which flavor you choose, you have to play on a console
- **“Get that thing outta here!”** Every kid knows that game machines need to be easily portable, especially when mom complains about the noise...
- **Nintendo:** These guys have \$4.5 billion, cash, in the bank. This pretty much secures a rosy future

The **fact** is that PCs and game machines will **continue to coexist**. And if this leads to a greater breadth and depth of **game styles**, who's complaining?

NEXT GENERATION

June 1996

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Next Generation (ISSN# 1078-9693) is

published monthly by Imagine Publishing,

Inc., 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA

94005, USA. Second-class postage paid at

Burlingame, CA, and at additional mailing

offices. POSTMASTER send changes of

address to Next Generation, PO Box

53680, Boulder, CO 80322-3680.

Newsstand distribution is handled by Curtis

Circulation Company. Subscriptions: one

year (12 issues) US \$34. Canada: \$48.

Foreign: \$58. Canadian price includes

postage and GST (GST# R 128 220688).

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Produced in the United States of America

Next Generation shares editorial with the

UK-based magazine EDGE, and is not

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luck in Denver, Jon. Ode to Trent: As reviews

editor you were a star / now you have gone

far / Wonder where you are / Glad Jeff got

your car / See you at the bar! We'll miss

your sunny disposition and chic LA style



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What the hell does Bill Gates know about games, anyway?

The answer may surprise you. In this world exclusive interview, the most successful entrepreneur on the planet waxes eloquent on Microsoft's entry into the gaming market, the role of consoles versus PCs, why Trip Hawkins' 3DO Multiplayer failed, and plenty more



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Curious about Microsoft's entry into the gaming market? **Next Generation** reveals the company's three-tiered gaming strategy and evaluates its chances for success. Will Microsoft '98 look like Nintendo '86? The definitive report starts on page 46



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How does Microsoft intend to coordinate its assault on the game industry? And should we be afraid?

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Tense? Nervous? Headache? Avoid the unpleasantness of buying a crap game: rely on NG to review and rate each new title for you. This month's games include: Sidewinder (PlayStation); Earthworm Jim 2, Shining Wisdom (Saturn); Cyberia (3DO); Allied General, Descent II (PC); Street Fighter Alpha 2 (Arcade)

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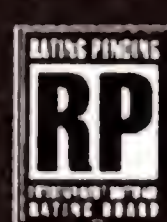
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**"I played the
videogames
of the time,
when I had
more time.
Frogger,
Pac-Man,
Defender..."**

**What
the Hell does
Bill Gates
know about games,
anyway?**



WORLD
EXCLUSIVE
INTERVIEW
9-page special
feature

He's arguably the most powerful man in the world. His company, Microsoft, could gobble up Sega, Nintendo, Atari, and The 3DO Company faster than you can say "Windows 95." And many cynical observers wouldn't be surprised at all if it did. So, what is Bill Gates' game plan?



Of course, one doesn't necessarily have to know how to beat Dr. Robotnik at the end of Green Hill Zone to run a successful game business. But it

would be nice to think that a man who wields so much power over us gamers at least knows his *Command* from his *Conquer*. And let's not for one minute underestimate Bill Gates' power. As the biggest consumer software company in the world, Microsoft has got serious muscles. And as its visionary leader, Gates gets to flex them.

But why has it taken Microsoft so long to notice the gaming world? And now that it has us firmly in its sights, is the \$6 billion (in annual sales) giant going to play rough, or prove itself to be a valuable addition to the gaming community? While we're at it, let's get a few of those niggling Windows 95 questions out of the way. And last, if Nintendo's Howard Lincoln is correct in fearing that Microsoft wants to "steal his lunch," just how hungry is Bill Gates feeling?

Next Generation met with Bill at Microsoft's HQ in Redmond, WA, for the following world-exclusive interview.

What took Microsoft so long?

NG: Given the success of Microsoft's *Flight Simulator*, and the boom of the PC game industry, why hasn't Microsoft put its full weight behind an assault on the gaming world before?

Bill: We've always had our hand in it to some degree. Putting one or two games in with the operating system has always been a good move, and you'll always see us do it. So we've always had a few titles, but mostly developed outside.

We saw the embarrassment of how hard it was to install games, and the conflicts between DOS games and productivity applications after we shipped Windows 3.1. And we saw it as holding back the home computer market. You really shouldn't have to have an expert friend to dig into your configuration file. And games were part of that. So part of [our goal] was making the PC a

more stable platform, having the games not destabilize the other things you were doing.

NG: Of course, many of Microsoft's other projects have significance for the game market...

Bill: The commitment to do the world's best graphics architecture, that started about three years ago, but these things take time. So we brought in the really smart people, and some of the super-advanced elements of this you won't see in the market for a couple of years. Then we'll be able to say, "Hey, we think we're way beyond even the most expensive Silicon Graphics workstation you can buy today, and at PC price-points."

NG: So are the games Microsoft is developing primarily designed to showcase Windows 95?

Bill: No, it's to make money. And so you'll see a lot more titles coming out from us internally — a lot more than ever before — and game titles coming out of the joint venture with DreamWorks Interactive as well.

NG: Let's forget Windows 95, and your other businesses for a moment. What do you feel Microsoft can bring to the party as a game developer? Why do you think gamers should welcome Microsoft's arrival to this genre?

Bill: People who play games a little bit are going to look at the individual games...

NG: You think that's how Microsoft's publishing effort should be appraised?

Bill: Ninety percent will. From 10% of the people you can get a notion that we really know how to test software; how to distribute software; how to take a long-term view of building very rich technologies into these games. Things like games that use voice input — that's going to happen, or games that are multiplayer in a very deep sense, interacting across the Net.

There's a lot of technology here, and having us be smarter about how we enhance the platform for games is probably good for the whole game industry. Even though we're very good at reaching out to third parties, I think having an internal game group will be part of that. I always

talking



encourage our game group to give our platform guys a hard time — and vice versa. There's been some good results from that already.

NG: The flip side of the coin: To what extent should gaming's current major players fear Microsoft's arrival? (Nintendo of America's President Howard Lincoln expressed considerable respect for Microsoft, but claimed awareness that "They want to eat my lunch, sure").

Bill: [smiles] Well, not really. I mean, are game consoles and PCs in competition? In the most direct sense, in the sense that you walk in and choose between a Sega and a Sony, it's not quite the same. Usually, if you want a PC and the kind of richness and general purpose things that it provides (you know, bring your work home, write your homework, all that), then you generally know before you walk in to the store that you want that. It's possible that when you buy a PC, then you say, "Hey, now I don't need to buy a game platform, I'll just do everything on my PC."

We don't have a strategy to do a \$200 game console that is a direct competitor to what Nintendo, Sega, and Sony are doing, and our business model isn't to charge software developers money. So, if you compare a Nintendo game, where you've got to have that big ROM that's very expensive and pay a royalty, versus a CD-ROM on the PC, where there's a zero royalty, it's quite different.

So even though the PC is more expensive and even though it'll edge down to the \$700 to \$800 range over the next two or three years, it is a very, very different price point to \$200. But when you buy games, you'll be able to find low-cost games in the \$20 to \$30 range for our platform. And the business model for the developers is more attractive at any price point.

Besides, we will be a smaller part of the game business on the PC platform than Nintendo is on the Nintendo platform, or Sony on the Sony platform, or Sega on the Sega platform. We're not hogging a broad range of games, nor do we have any prewired deals to bundle our games into any of these things.

So, yes, in a sense we're in competition. I mean, if we're promising to make graphics on the PC better than on a Silicon Graphics workstation, we sure as heck are going to make them better than on a \$200 game device. We've lagged behind (Sony's PlayStation handles texturing better than most PCs that are available), but the PCs you're going to start to see, maybe six months from now — certainly in the next 12 months — will be way beyond that.

PCs vs. consoles

NG: So you don't see either the PC or the dedicated game machines eventually dominating the market completely?

Bill: In terms of one totally wiping the other out, no. You know, I'm a PC lover and so I can tell you the schtick from somebody who's got a bias toward the PC. For every kid [with a PC] — even at a very young age — there's really great learning software. It's worth it if you can afford it. It's great exposing them to that.

Then as they move up into the age where they want action games or whatever, then hey, the PC's going to be there. And it is the most flexible device. The fact that you can actually store things away, the fact that you can add on to it, the fact that it has a display with better resolution, it's got a keyboard. There's just a lot of things you can do with a PC you can't do with a game machine.

And so, I think as PCs have very high penetration into homes, it's possible there would be a substitution effect against game machines. But, that's not to say the game machine category won't be there.

NG: One thing the PC doesn't have (that companies like Sega, Sony, and Nintendo have) is a dedicated marketing operation whose sole purpose is to promote each game console as the ultimate gaming platform. Are you willing to take on this role for the PC?

Bill: I'd say it's a role, and it's up to us to do that. Certainly to evangelize to software developers, that is totally our job. I think on a relative basis to a few years ago — and even on a relative basis to some of those game console suppliers — and in the absolute, I think you'd find that ISVs [independent software vendors, a.k.a. game



Microsoft's headquarters in Redmond, WA, on the outskirts of Seattle, is less than a five-minute walk from Nintendo of America's offices

publishers] say we're doing a pretty good job.

But it is our job to do the evangelism. Intel is often a help on these things, as are some of the system manufacturers, some of the board and chip manufacturers. But we're in the lead spot.

I think content rules, in terms of a message to consumers. Nowadays, you don't even see many ads about the consoles — you see ads about the games you can play on the console, or see the kid who seems to be playing these games looks like a pretty cool kid, and you'd be like him if you bought one. But, you know, it's really very content-driven nowadays as opposed to platform technology. I don't know, maybe it'll switch back.

NG: Do you see content currently stronger on the PC, or on the game machines?

Bill: Well, I think boxing games are better on the dedicated consoles. But if you get really broad and include *Myst*-like games, I mean, give me a break! There you need the storage and richness that comes with a PC.

The term "game," is a very broad term. The phenomenon of what's gone on with the game consoles is a fairly narrow part. There's a particular demographic with which the game console is strong, but the PC is much broader than that. So they both have relative strengths.

NG: But the console people would reply by pointing out that as long as a \$200 game console can do things that a \$2,000 PC can't do, there will be a market for it.

Bill: Oh, we're not going to have any more inversions like that. I mean, PCs will be a superset in every way — certainly all the PCs that ship in '97, and you'll never see that inversion re-emerge.

NG: So you're saying that the PC's graphics power is going to take off and never look back?

Bill: Well, it's my job to see that this happens. We are keenly aware of the comparison [between PCs and the 32-bit game machines] and I have almost no doubt we'll meet that test. The only advantage that the Sony PlayStation has is better texture mapping than most graphics cards in the PC. But when we demo'd at the Windows Hardware Engineering Conference [last April], the 3Dfx demo of *Valley of Ra* was way better than any game console. And that's a special add-in card that will be on PC motherboards in early '97.

NG: Playing devil's advocate a little, we're going to champion game consoles. And one huge advantage that they have over PCs is that you play games on the big screen TV in the comfy living room. Whereas to play the PC you typically have to sit close to the screen, alone, in a straight-backed chair, in the "home office."

The console way is much more fun.

Bill: Well, you have a very good point about the device that you sit close to and use with a keyboard, versus the device that you sit far away from. With the PC — because of the resolution of the screen — you can read text and you can sit



close to it. And it's got a keyboard.

The TV is typically a larger-size screen and the dot-pitch isn't nearly as good, but you sit far away and you mostly watch video-type material. So for multiplayer [gaming], where you're both on the same screen, either you're going to [play on a game machine] or you're going to plug the PC in so that it's driving your TV. And there is more and more of this going on. A lot of projection TV sets are going to have VGA connectors. And VGA-to-NTSC conversion is not very expensive. We need to make that easy.

Part of the question here is, in your living room — in terms of choosing TV channels or choosing audio sources — the PC, which can display information in a rich way, may become a nice tool. I mean, it's a lot easier than picking buttons on things and stuff like that. If you go to the super high-end, like the audio-video system that Paul Allen has, or I have, then we have PCs where we pick any DVD disk, or laser disk, or CD audio disk, we have a library and a database and we type the name and "boom," it's up there. That's a PC controlling our entertainment center. Well, that sort of thing actually will become reasonably priced for people. Anyway, the display issue you mention is a very interesting one.

NG: But this is as much a battle of household territory as anything else, and the game machines have already grabbed the prime gameplaying locations: under the main TV, and in the kids' rooms. Won't games inevitably be played in the living room and not the home office?

Bill: For certain types of games, that's true. Sometimes, you'll have a PC in the living room because it will be the central controller there. But, you're right, the scenario where you've got your game machine in the living room and you've

Can Bill Gates, the most successful entrepreneur of his generation, repeat his past level of success in the game industry?

"If we're promising to make graphics on the PC better than on a Silicon Graphics workstation, we sure as heck are going to make them better than on a \$200 game machine"



Moving more of Microsoft's game development in-house has required some major re-tooling of its HQ (including the addition of an entire collection of classic arcade games)

"For good action games, you'd better have some bit-twiddlers deeply involved or else it won't be that great"

got your PC in the den, that may not go away.

But the game machine has a pretty narrow appeal, in terms of the demographic. For really young kids, for girls, and for a lot of adults, the breadth of software that's really been out there for the game machines is not very rich. It's not like people do encyclopedias, or movie guides, or learn arithmetic from videogames.

NG: Now, is this because with no keyboard and no hard drive the game machines can't handle these types of software, or is it simply because the market hasn't asked for them yet?

Bill: Well, I'm not sure how you separate those two things out!

You know, it was always possible that one of the game machine guys was going to create some expandability and essentially grow it up to a PC. It was the Philips system, called CD-i, which was sort of supposed to be expandable (in as much as Matsushita showed it with a hard drive in it) and it was supposed to also be a gameplayer type thing. It was an attack on both game console and PC. It was a device that kind of basically got caught in the middle. It was a terrible game machine, and it was a terrible PC.

I can say that now because the thing failed. But Philips put real money into it. Well, I knew I was worried about it. They put real money into that thing, and they had a lot of content. There was to evangelize to going on, and some fairly creative ideas. They never did figure out, though, that you had to have good action games on the thing, so the hardware design and the to evangelize to never focused. It was always too soft. A little bit of golf or a little bit of opera, but nothing jazzy enough to make it move.

NG: If the CD-i needed good action games then, any world-conquering game platform is going to need good action games now. But — as we've

already pointed out — a \$2,000 PC can't do many action games as well as a \$200 game machine.

Bill: Oh, I agree. But we're getting good action games. I mean, look at the number of things we've done to get good action games onto the PC.

Microsoft's to evangelize to even includes the software developers inside these game console companies. You'll see most of the game console companies taking their software assets and porting them over to the PC. That's a big step forward for us. We have an operation, which is a joint venture between us and SoftBank, called Game Bank. So if the developer of cartridge games doesn't want to do [the PC conversion] themselves, then there's a company there that will do it for them.

Meanwhile, we evangelize them to do it directly. So, I don't think there will be many action games that are on game consoles that aren't on PCs and I think there will be quite a few on PCs that aren't on a game console.

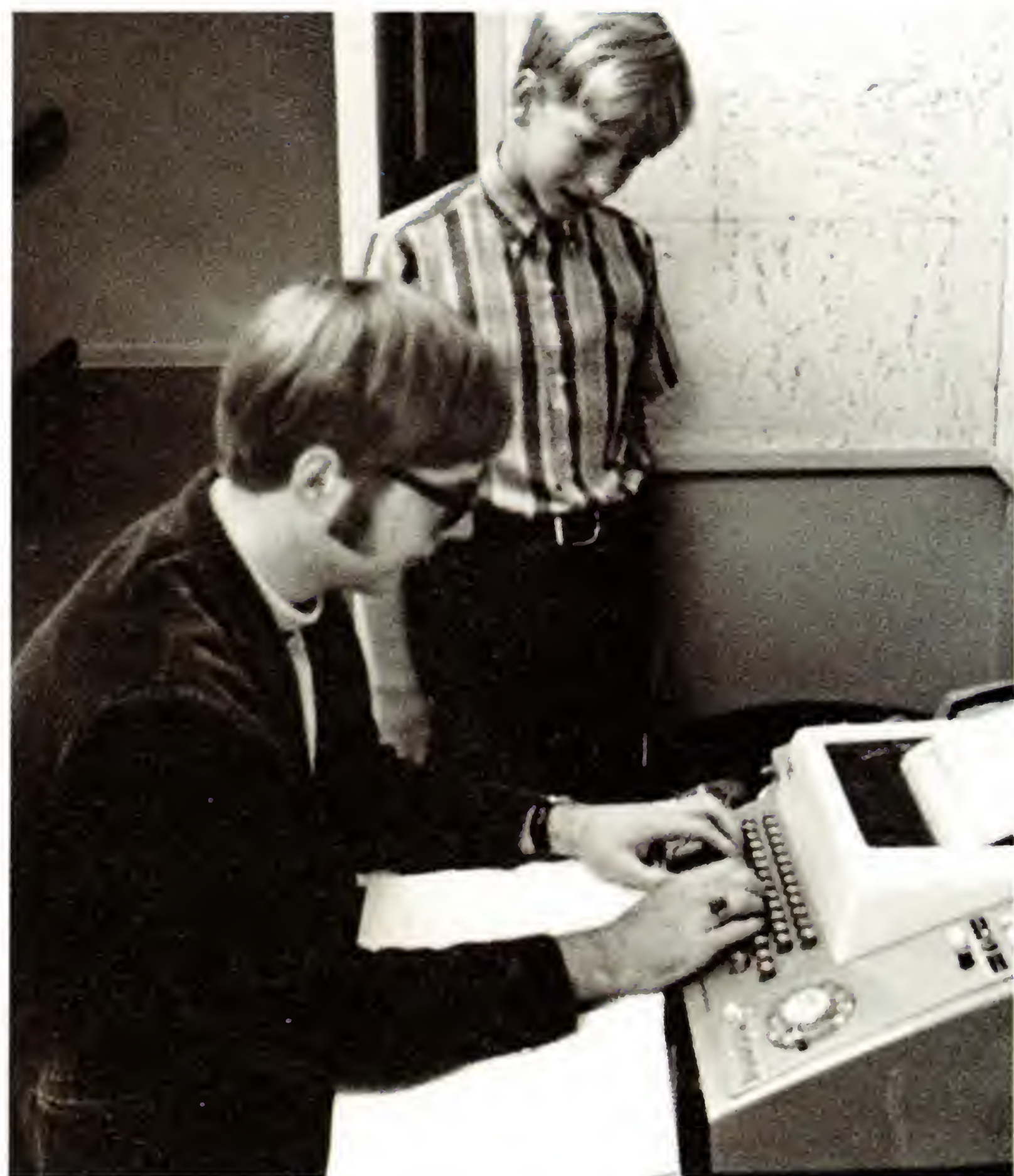
NG: And where the two coincide the PC version will be competitive if not better?

Bill: That's our job. And so if we fall short then, you know, then we say "OK, let's fix that." It's very hard for a device without storage to come in and compete with a lot of these things.

You want rich games to remember what level you're at, what you've done, and how to connect up to your friends.

Microsoft's game plan

NG: Microsoft is increasing its focus on the gaming industry in three major ways. First, now more than 50% of Microsoft-owned SoftImage's revenues come from sales of graphics software to game developers. Second, Windows 95 now is being promoted as the best way to play games on a PC. Third, Microsoft is ramping [continued on page 56]



Bill Gates (in back) and Paul Allen (in front), shown here in high school, founded Microsoft in 1975





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1996: Next Generation's game forecast

What does the future have in store for gamers? Time to put our reputation on the line...

Sega will increasingly fall back on what it — albeit capriciously — does best, and that is break new videogaming ground

In trying to forecast the game industry's future, **Next Generation** has regularly gone out on a limb. So far, at least, we've largely been right. We predicted the demise of 3DO's multiplayer, the 32-bit dominance of PlayStation, the rallying of Saturn, the death of Atari, the delay of Nintendo 64, all while other magazines were fumbling for the snooze button. And now, we offer our humble thoughts as to what will transpire throughout the rest of the year, 1996.

The big news is, of course, Nintendo 64, which will launch on September 30. Bundled with one joypad, the unit will retail for \$249 and sell like hot cakes. Unless, of course, Nintendo's legendary manufacturing problems (which, in all probability, were just an excuse to mask software delays) prevent the production of

enough units. But this is extremely unlikely. Gamers should, however, expect no more than four or five games available at launch. Nintendo will be extra careful to control inventory levels of these high-cost cartridges, and the company will also be keen to grab all the early adopters' software expenditure for itself (and its most highly favored partners). Nintendo 64 will not overtake PlayStation until sometime in 1997, but overtake it will.

Sony and Sega will respond to the considerable threat of Nintendo with a price drop to \$199. Sony will look to Sega to make the price cutting initiative, and then match the move. With a higher percentage of Sega's own titles making up Saturn's "must-have" game list, reduced manufacturing costs as a result of the introduction of the "white" Saturn, and, of course, the need to catch up with PlayStation, Sega will be the more aggressive of the 32-bit vendors. Tagging along behind, Sony Computer Entertainment of America will continue to have a hard time convincing its Japanese parent that losing money on hardware sales is a smart idea, but convincing it will have to be.

Gamers can also look to Sega to fight the battle ahead with innovative software as



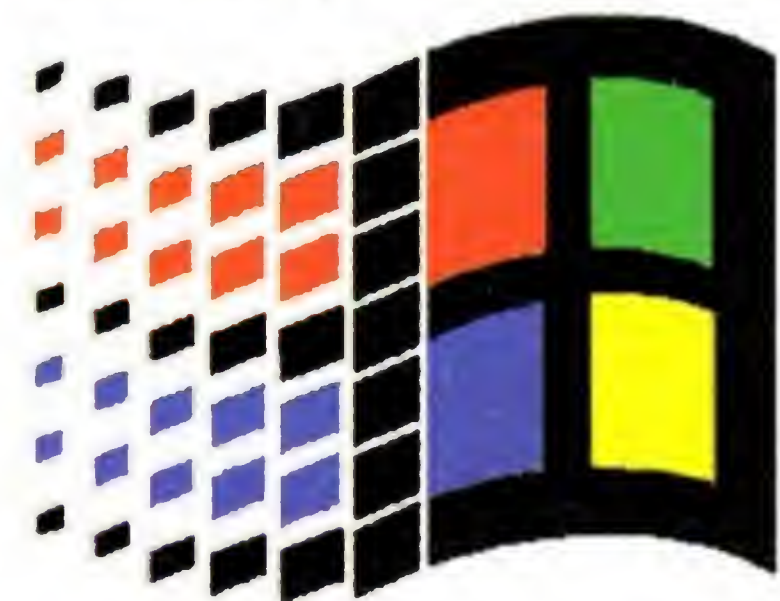
Next Generation has followed the rise and fall of all the next-gen systems, and has come through on many of its early predictions



The new "white" Saturn, complete with new joypad, is cheaper for Sega to manufacture, and is selling in Japan for the yen equivalent of about \$199



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Microsoft
Windows 95™



Windows 95's Direct3D API is supposed to make all cards work with all games. This will simplify the nasty incompatibilities that have haunted PC gamers in the past

its weapon of choice. Whereas Sony's initiative will center more around doing more of the same style games, only bigger, faster, and with 1996 updates (and there's nothing necessarily wrong with this), Sega will increasingly fall back on what it — albeit capriciously, does best — and that is make break new videogaming ground.

Having exhausted the back-catalog of big name arcade conversions (*Fighting Vipers* is the only exception), Sega will live or die on the success or failure of such diverse offerings as *3D Sonic* (Sega's direct challenge to *Super Mario 64*), *Nights* (the 32-bit brainchild of Yuji Naka, the creator of the original *Sonic the Hedgehog*), 10-player *Bomberman* (yup, HudsonSoft should have code completed this summer), and *Heart of Darkness* (see page 17).



Next Generation expects the best PlayStation games to surpass Saturn's finest in terms of graphics sophistication (we don't expect PlayStation to lose its perception as the "best" 32-bit system). But, a slew of rushed-to-market, cookie-cutter PlayStation releases will dilute the mix. (If a two-bit company is going to churn out just one "next-generation" title, it will be on the Sony platform.)

Expect PlayStation, however, to remain ahead of Saturn in terms sales figures. The gap will narrow, especially after the launch of N64, when PlayStation's trump card — simply being the most powerful game system money can buy — is snatched from its grasp. At this point, the war will be fought more on what games are available for what systems, and this is where Sega's exclusive arcade titles will yield dividends.

On the PC side, 1996 will be remembered as the year of the war that wasn't. In 1995, pundits were predicting a mass of graphics

accelerator cards battling it out for market dominance. Indeed, this will still be the case (there were more than 20 different cards out there, last time we checked). But with the introduction of Windows 95's Direct3D API (all cards will work with all games — at least, that's the theory), there's a good chance that gamers won't notice it. The war will be fought on system power, price, marketing, and (perhaps most significantly) distribution muscle. Not the user-unfriendly mire of complicated compatibility alliances and "killer app" software products (that don't work on any system other than the one it was specifically designed for) that the pundits had feared. And this is good news.

The year 1996 will also see the PC start to pull away from the game machines in terms of raw polygon-pushing power, and as a result of the introduction of online gaming. Mpath, TEN (Total Entertainment Network), and Catapult are all planning to bring an online game service to market later this year. While the potential exists for some compelling gameplay, **Next Generation** predicts that it will be 1997 before these services fulfill their potential. Utility will be stunted by system crashes, erratic performance, and — more subjectively — the realization that playing an anonymous gamer 1,000 miles away is not the same as having four buddies gathered around a conventional multiplayer game. Nevertheless, the seeds will be sown.

M2? Forget it. It's not going to happen this year. Instead, gamers will increasingly look to the arcades for high-tech thrills. *Virtua Fighter 3* alone will spark a renewed interest in arcade gaming, with Namco's answer to Yu Suzuki's masterpiece guaranteed to add fuel to the flames. Meanwhile, most home-system gamers can look forward to far too many "And-this-time-he's-in-3D!" 32-bit reworkings of successful 16-bit franchises — and we're prepared to bet that all of them fall between *Jumping Flash!* and *Super Mario 64*. Electronic Arts will rise again (it has no choice). A new form of *Sonic the Hedgehog* will rise like a phoenix from the 16-bit ashes.

And last, **Next Generation** will be here in prompt form to tell you all about it. Thanks for reading.



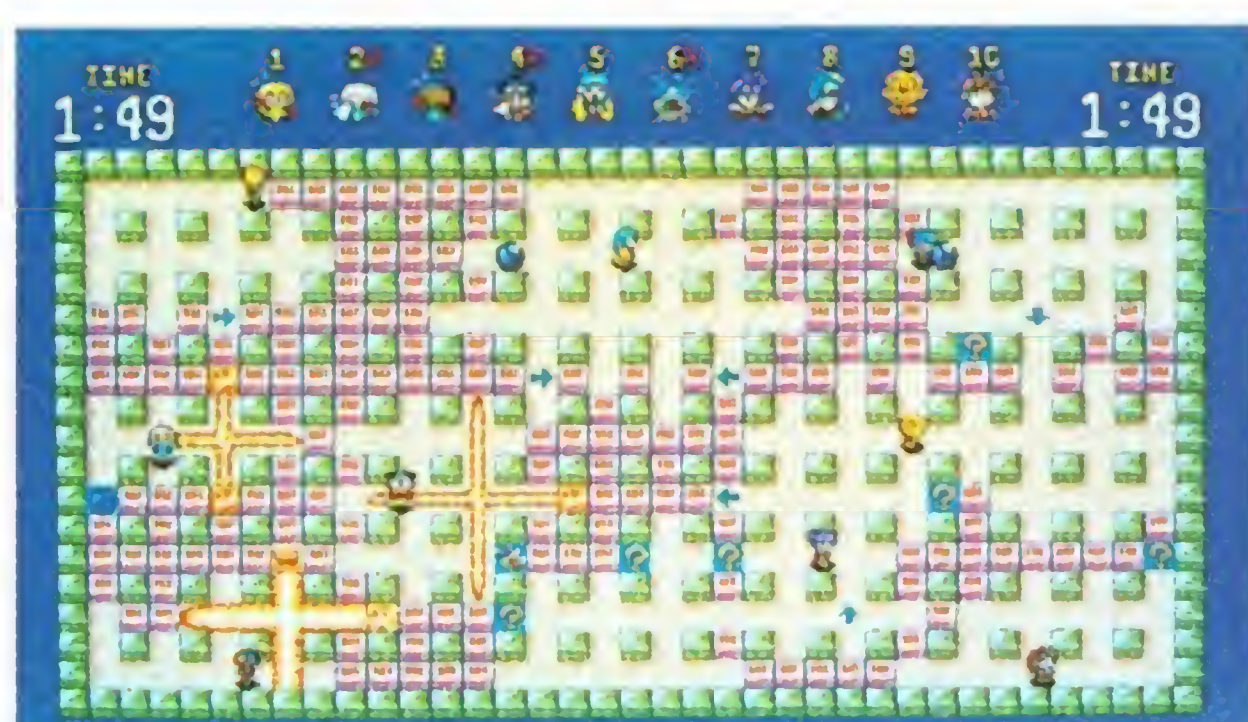
1996 will also see the PC start to pull away from the game machines in terms of raw polygon-pushing power




Fighting Vipers is, as of this writing, the last of the red-hot Sega arcade titles to be converted to the 32-bit Saturn

Activision not EA

In NG 17, a preview of *Time Commando* was attributed to EA as the game's publisher. EA is, in fact, the game's publisher in England, but not in the United States. Activision is the US publisher of *Time Commando*.



Maybe the most mind-blowing game of the '90s will be HudsonSoft's 10-player *Bomberman* (left). Nintendo's ace in the hole, *Super Mario 64*



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Sega creates alternate reality

Sega opens the doors of its seven-story theme park in London, UK



The rides cost Sega \$1 billion to research and develop

Billed as the world's largest "futuractive" indoor theme park, SegaWorld, situated in London's Trocadero center, is scheduled for an August opening. The park, which cost \$70 million to develop, takes up seven floors of Piccadilly Circus's entertainment complex and will have a capacity of around 3,000 visitors at a time. The entry price has not yet been finalized, but Sega is internally discussing whether it should charge \$15 or \$24 per person.

SegaWorld features six main rides dispersed over six themed zones — Sports Arena, Flight Deck, Race Track, The Carnival, Sega Kids, and Combat Zone. The rides, which cost Sega around \$1 billion to research and develop, all have interactive elements which means, as Sega asserts, "each visitor will have a totally unique experience and no two visits to the attraction will ever be the same."

Two of the rides — Beast in Darkness and Aqua Planet — are totally unique to SegaWorld. The first is a kind of ghost-train ride, but with unspecified interactive elements, and the second is a "motion-based 3D undersea experience" which, apparently, is so realistic that test riders held their breath, thinking they were genuinely in water.

On Aqua Planet, as with another of the six rides, Space Mission, visitors wear a Mega Visor Display (MVD), onto which a virtual reality image is projected. Sega claims that, "On a moving ride linked to the projected images, the visitor can

interact with the images, feeling totally immersed in the surrounding." Effectively this means that, when looking left, the MVD presents the scenery as such, as is the case when looking up. Furthermore, when participants look down, they will see their clothes transformed into a space suit or diving costume — depending, of



This computer-rendered model shows the architectural design of SegaWorld, in all its full, garish, metallic glory



SegaWorld promises a mixture of all-around entertainment, from rides to arcade games

course, on the ride they're in.

The last three rides are Ghost Hunt (a sit-in taxi ride in which passengers can use laser guns to fire at ghosts on a 3D screen), Mad Bazooka (a bumper car, where each car is equipped with a ball-firing bazooka and scores are given on hits for and against), and Sega's AS1 Simulator. Various top-end Sega arcade machines will also be placed around each zone, but for now Sega hasn't revealed any specifics.

Each visit to SegaWorld will take about four hours, though visitors are welcome to stay longer. The park layout is anticlockwise and spiral. Visitors start by being transported to the top floor in a "rocket escalator," then go down floor by floor. And, a Sega retail outlet will be on location.

Sega hopes each ride's blend of motion simulation, virtual reality, and "the latest in computer graphics" will go toward attracting at least 1.75 million visitors in its first year. Furthermore, with an eye on longevity, the company stresses that each ride will be regularly updated and that a major attraction will be added every year.

Sega FECs

Sega plans on building family entertainment centers (FECs) all across the US, and has installed many already. The newest is Sega's Meridian in Seattle. For more information about SegaWorld, there is a web site at <http://www.segaworld.com>, which carries press releases and a small description of each ride.

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Divorce absolute for Sega and M2

The 64-bit partnership that never officially was, has ended



Clandestine talks between Sega and Matsushita concerning the latter's licensed M2 technology have broken down.

Whispers of Sega's interest in the technology were circulating before Matsushita secured the license to produce an M2-based game machine from a beleaguered 3DO company last year for \$100 million. However, when Matsushita took over, more focused rumors sprang up to the effect that the electronics giant was holding talks with Sega with a view to licensing on the M2 technology. Both companies have consistently denied ongoing rumors of a possible collaboration, but Sega took consignment of an M2 prototype for analysis early this year — giving weight to continued speculation.

There are two reasons why the covert talks collapsed. First of all, **Next Generation** has learned that Sega wanted to be the sole M2 brand, which would have contravened Matsushita's hopes of setting up M2 as a standard with several other hardware companies on board. Second, although Sega technicians were reportedly impressed with M2, they were not sufficiently awestruck to warrant its immediate implementation into their plans.

Meanwhile, The 3DO Company's own software development for M2 goes ahead at pace, despite some initial difficulties. A source close to the M2 project told **Next Generation**,

"To begin with, Studio 3DO developers found M2's workstation-like architecture tough to deal with in terms of maximizing performance." It is known, however, that one of the more able developers, working in conjunction with the internal graphics experts, has designed a low-level 3D engine specifically for M2.

Next Generation's source was full of praise for this new engine, which is being used in an as of yet unnamed driving game. "You've got to see it to believe it," the source said. "It's as big a leap in graphics performance from the 32-bit games as you could imagine. All I can say about M2 is that, for once, a machine may actually live up to its hype."

3DO has also teamed up with Cirrus Logic, a leading manufacturer of advanced integrated circuits, to develop a 3D accelerator for the PC.

3DO is contributing its M2 3D engine and Cirrus Logic is bringing its video graphics controller technology to the project. The accelerator is designed to be compatible with 3D games written for Microsoft's Direct 3D, and is expected to surface for this winter holiday season.

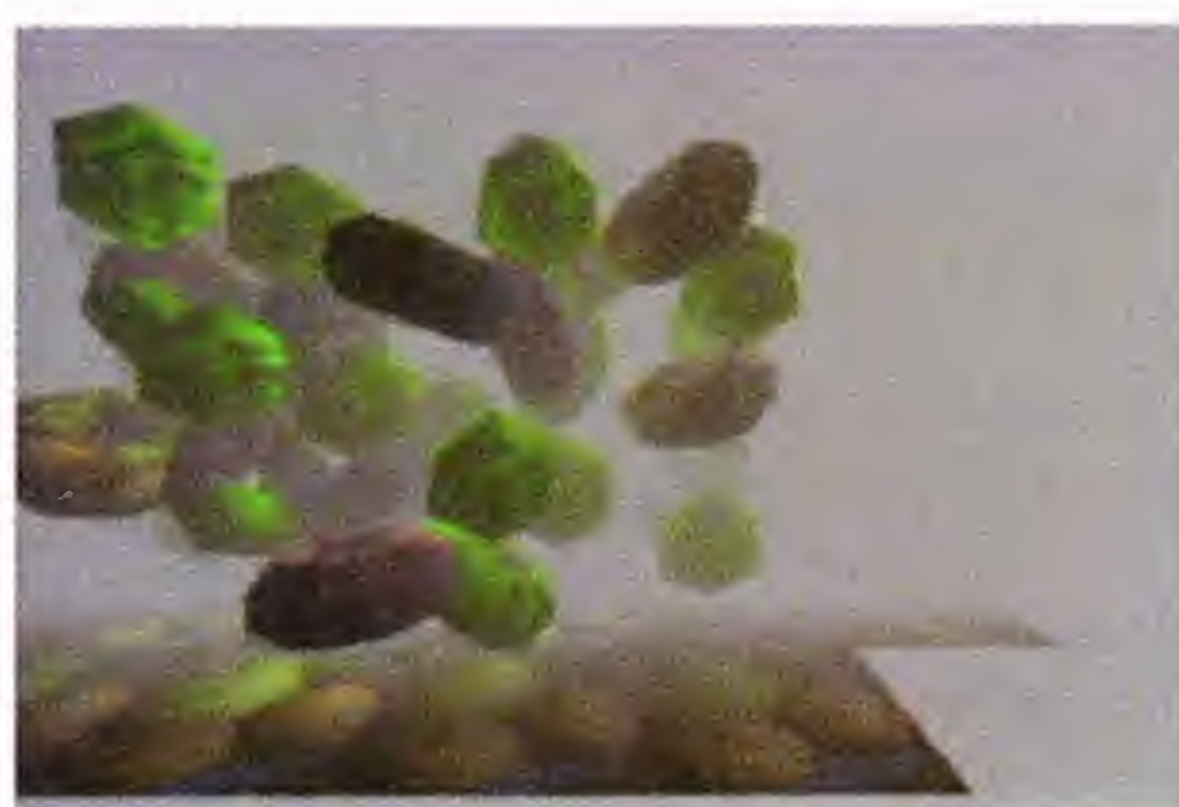
The 3D graphics acceleration card market is becoming a little crowded lately, but the 3DO/Cirrus effort will benefit greatly from the inclusion of 3DO's 64-bit technology. M2's 3D engine is capable of processing 500,000 polygons per second and the rendering engine generates more than 100 million pixels per second, resulting in a greater resolution than 640x480.

Add this to the flexibility of Windows 95's Direct3D API and PC graphics will really cook.

Saturn's Heart of Darkness

In preparation for this fall's battle with Nintendo 64, Sega has secured the rights to release *Heart of Darkness*, one of 1995's most anticipated (and delayed) titles on Saturn this fall, before it appears on the PC. This visually stunning game was first previewed back in NG 6 and is being developed by the French outfit Amazing Studios.

The game follows the adventures of a boy and his dog. Such is the quality of the imagery that the main character alone draws on a pool of 1,600 frames of animation in one direction (most cartridge games can handle a total of 1,200). It also features a full 27 minutes of prerendered animation.



This M2 demo features numerous polygons spinning around a central axis. But there just isn't anything here that hasn't been done before



The only running demo of M2's technology is this poor-quality QuickTime movie doing the rounds on the internet. Although the image quality is dire, it is still possible to recognize some of M2's abilities — a video sequence is wrapped around a polygon, which bends and morphs into a torus. Unfortunately, in the final analysis, the entire sequence fails to impress

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New software prolific at PlayStation Expo

Sony plays host to yet another dedicated software event

This year's PlayStation Exposition, which showcased an impressive 229 games from 78 exhibitors, took place in Harumi in the center of Tokyo.

The event's highlight was a private presentation — only 50 show attendees were invited, including *Next Generation* — of *EO*, the new game from *D* creators, Warp. Weighing in on four CDs, the title is an expansion on the *D* theme, with a number of beautifully conceived, prerendered sequences but also more graphics generated on the fly. Due to ship in the summer, *EO* already has Japanese journalists in a frenzy, but, despite the marked improvements over its predecessor, it's unlikely to generate the same levels of excitement when it arrives in the West.

Sony's naturally enormous presence at the show manifested in a huge booth separated into two parts, one demonstrating Sony-brand titles, the other debuting products developed outside of Japan under the new "Yoge" label (including British games *Wipeout* and *Destruction Derby*).

Seemingly running short of ideas, Sony presented *Jumping Flash 2* and *Motor Toon GP 2*, both attracting a lot of attention despite their lack of originality. Sony's only original game of note was *Popoloclois*, another example of the growing band of role-playing games to hit the PlayStation.

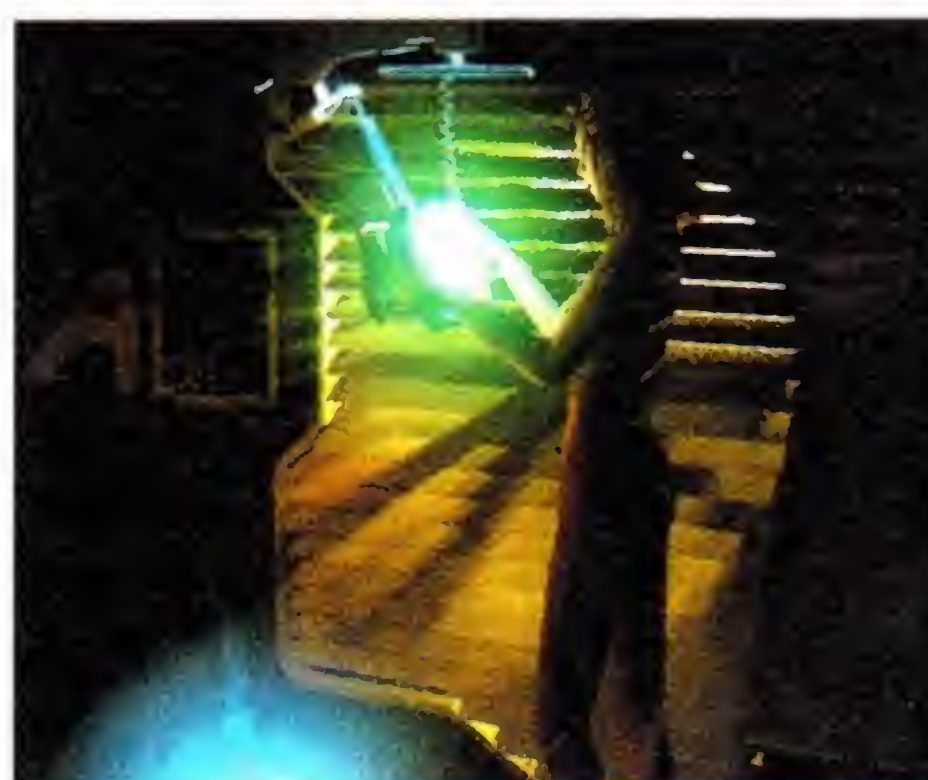
Sequels seemed the order of the day all round, in fact. Zoom showed an early version of *Zero Divide 2*, while Namco naturally unveiled *Tekken 2* and Genki presented the bizarrely titled *Beltooger 9*, a follow-up to the *Kileak The Blood* series. Continuing in the *Doom*-style template, its gameplay is significantly more accessible than the original's while its graphics retain *Kileak*'s dark feel but with a greater level of complexity.

A surprise Expo hit was *Digital Mission VFX* from Bandai. Although its crowd-drawing potential was no doubt bolstered by its origins (the game is based on popular *anime* series

"*Macross*"), it proved an entertaining title in its own right.

SNK's PlayStation conversions of *Samurai Spirits* and *King Of Fighters '95* affirmed the company's beat 'em up

inclinations, and fans of the theme were also treated to



Warp's *EO* was one title heavily hyped at the PS-X Expo (top). Takara's *Choro Q* (right)



Capcom's *Vampire: Night Warriors*. The *Street Fighter* creator's other big 32-bit title, *Resident Evil*, was demonstrated to the accompaniment of a troupe of zombies and proved ample vindication of the company's change of direction after countless 2D fighters.

Among the numerous small-fry developers clogging up the exhibitions' two halls, other notables could be found in the form of Takara showing *Choro Q*, Banpresto (with *Megatudo*), and Konami (with a *Snatcher*).

PlayStation Expo '96 was a telling event, illustrating that the 32-bit software scene is becoming as stifled with average titles as the 16-bit equivalent was before it. It also demonstrated Sony's own problems: in the 16 months since the machine's launch, its in-house development facility has yet to bear one single triple-A grade product, leaving the likes of Namco to carry the flag for the format in the foreseeable future.



SCE's "Yoge" label releases foreign PS software in Japan

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Nintendo's new color handheld

After years of speculation and rumor, *Next Generation* can confirm that Nintendo is making preparations to unveil the follow-up to its highly successful GameBoy. The 32-bit, color-screen machine, developed by a research and development outfit in Cambridge, England, is codenamed Project Atlantis.

Having spoken with sources close to Nintendo, *Next Generation* has learned that the machine will release in at least one territory before the year's end. Project Atlantis features a low capacity chip which will run the 3 by 2-inch color screen machine for up to 30 hours. Our sources claim that the machine will not be compatible with any other hardware currently available on the market. It isn't beyond the realms of possibility, however, that Project Atlantis is a spin-off of Nintendo's disappointing Virtual Boy. This could be seen as a way to recoup some of Nintendo's heavy research and development costs.

Development tools have been sent out to selected game developers, all of which are under strict nondisclosure agreements.

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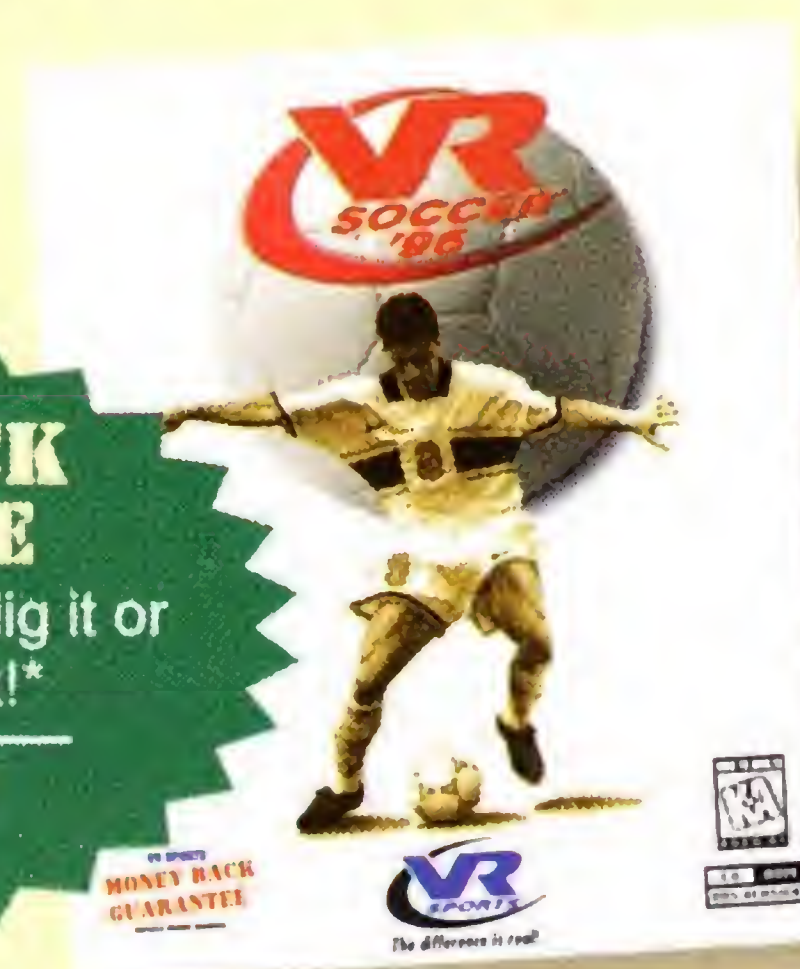
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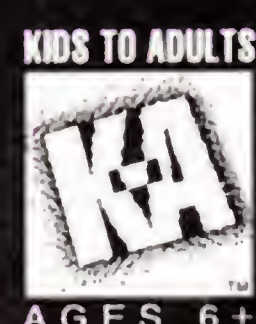
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breaking

movers & shakers

A monthly look at
business news affecting
the gaming world

by Chris Sherman



Christopher V. Sherman is the publisher of *MMWIRE*, the leading daily news service on the business of interactive entertainment. *MMWIRE ONLINE* can be found at <http://www.mmwire.com>. Email him at multimediawire@interramp.co

BMG COMES OUT KICKING

NEWSLINE: Videogame publisher BMG Interactive is getting into the ever-expanding sports videogame market. To kick off the brand, BMG signed a strategic licensing agreement with Major League Soccer, the new U.S. professional outdoor league, Division 1, that commenced play in April. The first MLS title is expected to reach retail shelves in spring of 1997 and is expected to launch on PlayStation, Saturn, and PC CD-ROM.

BOTTOMLINE: While the category has seen a number of newcomers in recent months, BMG appears to have compiled a competitive team. The company's dedicated sports brand will be under the direction of Don Traeger, former cofounder of EA Sports. Z-AXIS, which contributed to the *John Madden Football* line, is the development partner in the deal. And BMG Interactive President Jay Moses is himself a former producer at ABC Sports.



As part of the creative team of *John Madden Football*, Z-AXIS joins BMG's new sports line

NATO'S GOT ZIP ON THESE GUYS

NEWSLINE: Videogaming startup Zipper Interactive, Inc. recently signed a strategic alliance with Viacom New Media to develop games for Viacom.

BOTTOMLINE: Keep an eye on these guys. Zipper has been quietly toiling away since June 1995 and the deal with Viacom is valued at more than \$1 million. Zipper is presently working on *Death Drome* (Windows 95, PlayStation), an action arcade game for winter '96 release. Zipper, founded by Jim Bosler and Brian Soderberg, was created to design and develop 3D realtime action games.

All of the company's titles are expected to use its GameZ 3D engine, realtime battle sim software used by the U.S. military and NATO.

DID SOMEONE SAY ONLINE GAMING?

NEWSLINE: Engage Inc., wholly owned by Interplay Productions, has surfaced to take its stake in the emerging online multiplayer gaming market.

BOTTOMLINE: Here is another one to keep an eye on. Interplay may own this baby right now but company executives know a hot market when they see it. In the next several months (perhaps by the time you read this) Engage will be an independent company, with other investors. Why? Venture capitalists and other types are foaming at the mouth when they hear of the online gaming prospects. Besides, Engage will have a better chance at getting other game partners to come aboard when it is not wholly owned by Interplay.

ANOTHER EA GRADUATE GOES OUT ON HIS OWN

NEWSLINE: Startup AnyRiver Entertainment is attempting to carve out its niche in the crowded gaming industry, with five titles currently under development. AnyRiver will focus on developing PC CD-ROM and next-generation titles in the action and adventure genres.

BOTTOMLINE: Electronic Arts graduates are turning up faster than Microsoft graduates, forming their own gaming companies. AnyRiver is founded by former Electronic Arts executive Stewart Bonn and investors include Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers. Nothing to sneeze at. The startup has already signed a number of partnerships for title development including: PostLinear Entertainment and Trippet Studios, the special effects house that worked on films such as *Jurassic Park* and *RoboCop*. Also on the menu is a fantasy-action game being developed in collaboration with Advance Reality.

INDUSTRY ACQUISITIONS CONTINUE

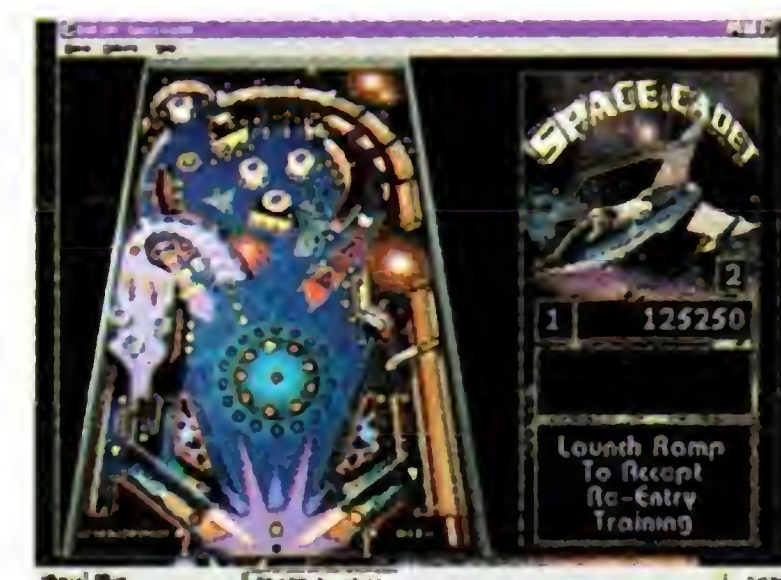
NEWSLINE: Maxis, Inc., developer of *SimCity* and other simgames, has signed a definitive agreement to acquire Cinematronics, a developer of action and arcade titles.

BOTTOMLINE: As new companies burst onto the scene others get snapped up. Upon completion of this deal, the acquisition will result in a one-time charge of up to \$2.3 million to Maxis' operating results. The two companies aren't strangers to one another. Cinematronics developed *Full Tilt! Pinball* (NG 15) for Maxis and it "marked Maxis' debut into the action category."



ELECTRONIC ARTS® STUDIOS

Rats leaving a sinking ship? EA's woes show no sign of abating as key staff leave to pursue success with startups



Another big company gets bigger and a small company gets swallowed up, as Maxis acquires Cinematronics, the maker of *Full Tilt! Pinball*

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JOYRIDING

The latest developments in online gaming



What's coming down the road for online gaming? The year of 1996 promises to be a big year for the field, and things are shaping up already. Here is what's up.

The big boys, like your local Baby Bell and AT&T, know that online is where it's at. Sound and animation is now possible on the Web through Netscape plug-ins like Shockwave and RealAudio (though trying it on anything less than an ISDN line is an exercise in Zen). Problem is, these big companies aren't sure what they should be doing. AT&T folded its online service in favor of an open Web model, and its plans for online gaming went out with the bathwater.

Not only did those plans include games on Interchange (the SSI *AD&D Darksun* engine was rumored to appear on Interchange, which would have made it the most sophisticated multiplayer RPG online), but they also apparently included the ImagiNation Network (INN). INN has a very tight relationship with Sierra (which was the original creator of INN, and was purchased by CUC, a mail-order retailer) which seems to be re-energized with a few new excellent games, *Earthsiege 2* and the upcoming *Red Baron II* (NG 17) that look well suited for some sort of multiplayer online play.

Other gaming services on the commercial providers are gearing up, too. Now that GE Information Services has washed its hands of Genie, expect the games on that service (*Air Warrior*, *Cyberstrike*, multiplayer *BattleTech*) to leave like rats off a sinking ship. Some of these offerings will almost certainly appear on AOL, but Genie, a service with a big online game component, and an idea which was ahead of its time, may be a part of history. Time will tell.

More impressive still are the Mpath and Total Entertainment Network (TEN) folks, who have managed to generate quite a bit of

buzz regarding their networks (even though neither network is up at the time of this writing). And DWANGO, which is now online, is stuck fighting shadows until these two new services are open. TEN is the closest to coming online to the general public. It showed off the service at the Computer Game Developers' Conference with *Duke Nukem 3D* over the Internet, through a local Internet Service Provider, to a game server in Michigan with an off-the-shelf 14.4 K-bits-per-second modem. And it all worked just fine.

TEN has a few alliances that should prove interesting with a big cash infusion and content from folks like Apogee (*Duke Nukem 3D* has many fans) and Spectrum Holobyte

The heavy-hitters of the game world are entering the online gaming market with full-blown multiplayer games designed to support hundreds of gamers at once

(who pioneered LAN gaming with the venerable classic *Falcon 3.0*). TEN entered a full beta test with its online service this spring, and as soon as I experience more, you'll be sure to hear all about it.

Mpath is a bit further out, but it has plans to launch its own service for Internet-based gaming this year. The benefits? Despite being a WWW-based service, Mpath claims that it has solved the latency problem — the single biggest barrier to playing fast-action arcade games over a telephone line — and that it will support real chat through speech (thus opening a market for voice alteration software, enabling men to sound like women, and vice versa).



Bernard Yee has contributed to *USA Today* and writes regularly for *PC Gamer*, *PC Magazine*, and has authored several books on gaming

by Bernard Yee

One major reason Mpath is so confident is that it has entered into a strategic alliance with PSINet, the owner of Pipeline and Interramp (an ISDN-accessible ISP), and therefore the owner of a big, fat data pipe (called a backbone, for obvious reasons) on the Net. If you're a Pipeline or Interramp subscriber and Mpath is on that data pipeline, you won't have to go through any odd routes that non-Pipeline subscribers might require. In a nutshell, to enjoy the maximum low latency Mpath claims to offer, you'll have to switch ISPs to one of the PSI services, which is a convenient setup.

What may be the most exciting development, however, is the heavy-hitters of the game world, who are entering the online gaming market with full-blown multiplayer games designed to support hundreds of gamers at once. An example of this is Origin Systems' *Multima*, which has just entered preliminary alpha testing. And just in case you've been gaming under a mossy rock for the last 15 years, *Ultima* is one of the most successful computer RPGs ever.

Multima is an Internet-based multiplayer online version of *Ultima*, and the initial alpha claims to have more than 3,000 participants, with the client software providing a complete environment on each gamer's machine. Origin claims that you'll be able to enjoy state-of-the-art graphics, and customize your avatar (your online alter-ego) with gender, hair color, and clothing. This online universe was designed to be self-perpetuating; a simulated resource system enables the game to manage itself so that it can generate quests, conversations, NPCs, and monsters, all on its own. *Multima* will be Windows 95 native, another good reason to upgrade.

So while the time for online gaming's not quite here yet, it's coming real soon. And gaming might not be the same again.

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Arcadia

All the latest coin-op and arcade news



Marcus Webb is the editor-in-chief of *RePlay* magazine, the US' leading trade amusement magazine

by **Marcus Webb**



Capcom hopes *Star Gladiators* will keep gamers happy 'til *Street Fighter 3*



Time Warner Interactive is now part of the hugely successful WMS empire

WMS acquires Time Warner/Atari Games

Shakeout and consolidation rocks on! The Chicago juggernaut known as WMS, Inc. has swallowed up another former competitor: Atari Games Corp. (Time Warner Interactive). WMS is the parent of Williams/Bally-Midway and is the creator of *Mortal Kombat*, *Killer Instinct*, and *War Gods*, among other popular videogames.

The purchase was completed March 29. Atari is an indirect, wholly-owned, subsidiary of Time Warner Inc. Reliable sources put the buying price around \$25 million. WMS executives said Atari will remain in the Milpitas, CA factory site and will be run as a separate division under the WMS umbrella. Atari's sales, marketing, and engineering people are reportedly going to be asked to stay on. WMS executives said they would send some of their seasoned engineers to visit Atari, with a view toward helping the company become better organized and more competitive. We'll see if the WMS magic rubs off!

Japan previews more games at AOU

The springtime trade show in Japan Arcade Operators' Union (AOU) was chock-full of advanced videogame graphics, as well as games that weren't shown at the American Coin Machine Exposition (ACME). Namco showed *Prop Cycle* (previewed on page 95), an *Alpine Racer*-style simulator where players pedal bicycle-type foot pedals and use a steering wheel to navigate an on-screen paraglider, bursting nearby balloons as they swoop through the air. Jaleco showed *Super GT 24 Hours*, a driving simulator in a two-player sit-down cabinet. It uses Sega's Model 2 platform under license. Up to four players can play in two linked units, and a dedicated one-player version may also be offered. Gameplay features two different courses (easy and hard), but you can drive each course in two directions.



Namco continues its arcade experimentation with *Prop Cycle*

Jaleco also showed a redemption shooting novelty called *Space Fighter* where you aim rubber balls at alien invaders. Sega showed *Decathlete* for the Titan system and a compact version of *Virtual On*. Capcom showed *Star Gladiators*, featuring *Tekken*-style advanced computer graphics thanks to a Sony/Namco PlayStation platform (the System 11 board). Visco showed a choose-your-aircraft shooting game called *Storm Blade*, plus a Neo-Geo driving game called *Drift Out*. SNK talked up its forthcoming 64-bit universal video system which will be introduced alongside Neo-Geo; the newer system will debut at this fall's JAMMA Show. Taito showed three videos not seen at ACME: *Super Football Champ*, *Psychic Force*, and *Ray Force*.

Sega Model 2 technology licensed to Data East, Jaleco, and Tecmo

It's a sure sign the leaders in the technology race have lapped the field when they start licensing current technology to their competitors. Sega Enterprises Ltd. (Japan) previewed its 1-million-polygons-per-second Model 3 technology at ACME '96 and will debut *Virtua Fighter 3*, the first game to utilize the new board, in Japan this summer and in the US this fall.

In the meantime, Sega's current Model 2 board (which supported mega-hits like *Daytona USA* and *Virtua Fighter 2*) has been licensed to three other Japanese videogame factories: Jaleco, Data East, and Tecmo. The strategy behind this is similar in concept to when RCA developed color TV and licensed the technology to its competitors: It's better for the technology leader to bring the entire industry along. According to Sega, the thinking is that "if videogame development is monopolized by only one or two companies, a general deterioration in quality may hamper the trade's development."

All three licensees now have Model 2 games in development: *Super GT 24 Hours* at Jaleco (shown in two-player cockpit format at the February AOU Expo in Japan); *Air Walkers* (a basketball game) at Data East; and *Dead or Alive* at Tecmo (the latter was previewed at the recent ACME Show). Data East says it's also developing its own hi-tech computer graphics system, by the way.

3Dfx: impressive

Why are companies like Jaleco, Tecmo, and Data East licensing videogame technology from such as Sega these days? Because R&D at this "Star Wars" level is just getting too darned expensive, that's why. You're going to see much, much more of this kind of business in the future and a new Mountain View, CA company called 3Dfx Interactive will probably grab a huge share of it.

During the ACME Show, our eyes popped at its display of system components and design tools intended to make it possible to create and sell truly low-cost, ultra hi-tech games (with texture-mapping, realtime image generation, 1.6 million polygons per second, the whole nine yards) for the coin and home markets alike. Products and systems go under names like "Obsidian" and "Voodoo Graphics 3D Accelerator," but the point is 3Dfx produces sharp-looking results on the monitor. The company plans to sell them off the shelf, one unit at a time, rather than insisting on costly licensing fees. It will make its money by expanding the number of players and locations that can handle these advanced games on the coin-op format. The firm also has some major additional assets, including: \$17.7 million in venture capital — enough to make things happen.



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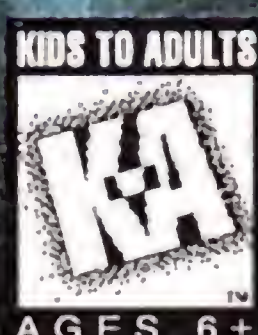
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Generator

As CPUs begin to incorporate more specialized chip functions, will the dedicated graphics processor be assimilated as well?



by George Zachary

In the world of gaming, most people believe that sophisticated gameplay and realistic graphics sell each new generation of software. In the world of semiconductor chips, most people believe that Moore's Law (performance doubles every 18 months) sells each new generation of hardware. Since chips perform the computations that act as the bedrock for gameplay and graphics, one can see that "better" chips probably means "better" games, especially given the horsepower-hungry computations necessary for the kind of graphic realism consumers demand. This leads to the current debate among hardware designers over whether current and future Pentium MXX processors can do the job alone, or will they continue to require graphics adaptors, and where in the computer's architecture the next generation of adaptors will reside. In my view, the CPU can't do it alone.

In terms of the game logic, running routines on the CPU is the wise choice, especially since there is a stream of general-purpose CPU performance improvements coming that is perfect for game logic. When it comes to multimedia and graphics routines, however, you have a choice between either writing software routines to the CPU, or adding some form of specialty hardware. Application and graphics routines, on the other hand, have such completely different instruction set behaviors that working from software quickly clogs a CPU's pipeline. On workstations, this is solved by adding an extra chip: a custom 3D graphics ASIC (application-specific integrated circuit). This chip enables the CPU to go on its merry way, computing the overall logic of the simulation, while the ASIC performs the polygon and pixel operations. The VGA adaptor in your PC at home performs much the same function when you move screens around in Windows — the adaptor handles moving the pixels, while the CPU is free to run the application.

But when looking at semiconductor history, it's evident that this kind of functionality passes through a process involving the underlying chips themselves. First, functions like polygon operations show up as custom ASICs. Then the function is taken over by more general-purpose digital signal processors [DSPs] surrounded by custom gates. Functions then become built into the CPU with some off-chip custom gates. Finally, everything runs in the CPU except for any remaining analog functions. As CPUs become faster and can handle more functions, the CPU becomes a black hole pulling in functionality from across the motherboard, and wins this functionality tug-of-war when it can accomplish the task "good enough." This is what happened to the floating-point co-processor chip market. This once prosperous market has been consumed by CPU giants because floating-point functionality was generic, necessary for a wide range of applications, and was neatly integrated into the microprocessor.

Now we find this happening to MPEG decompression routines. The market for hard-wired MPEG-only PC chips is drying up as Intel's CPU starts to absorb more of the

functionality. Even modem functions, sound synthesis, and 3D graphics functionality are now edging closer to the CPU black hole. But they won't be consumed for a fundamental reason: One of the instruction set areas that multimedia requires is with multiply/add instructions, which makes up the basic staple of 3D polygon processing, MPEG intra-frame processing, and, not coincidentally, modem functions and sound synthesis. Until recently, this was the sole province of off-CPU accelerators. CPU manufacturers are trying to change this by offering basic multiply/add instructions as CPU enhancements, and, to an extent, this will result in more 3D polygons per second and more MPEG frames per second.

It won't begin to approach, however, the levels necessary for the high quality images which drive general consumer demand, especially in the game market, where the main attraction to buying the latest software is because it looks "way cooler." This is especially true when you consider that multimedia itself, much less a CPU-based approximation, hasn't even reached the "good enough" point yet — that won't happen until multimedia looks the same on screen as it does in the physical world.

These higher quality images rely on complex pixel processing hardware which won't appear on CPUs. The reason for this is that pixel processing hardware needs a dedicated, multistage hardware pipeline, and a CPU is the worst economic and architectural place to put this pipeline. A general purpose CISC processor, like a Pentium, has an instruction set that must, by necessity, support a wide range of applications. Adding the very specific operations like multiply/add required for pixel processing simply loads down the CPU with

instructions few applications will use (floating point operations, remember, integrated to the CPU so well because a wide range of applications could benefit). This also means pixel processing must wait its turn in the processor cycle.

Therefore, there must be some form of multimedia accelerator to handle the high-quality images consumers want. Console vendors have figured this out already and have prioritized their silicon budget to multimedia processing, not CPUs. PC vendors will pick which broad multimedia accelerator to offer on the motherboard to compliment the Intel Pentium MMX. Expect one or two multimedia chips to survive by offering low prices (less than \$150), broad multimedia functionality (including modem and sound functions, since they share instruction sets that are similar to pixel processing), and the support of the next mega-hit game.

In 20 years, CPUs may boast the raw speed to handle all pixel processing on its own. But by then we'll have moved from 2D pixel processing to 3D voxel processing, and the debate will rage over ways to accelerate those operations.

George Zachary, who, when working with Silicon Graphics, was interviewed in NG 14, is now a partner at Mohr Davidow Ventures, a technology venture capital firm. To contact George try sending email to him at gzachary@mdv.com

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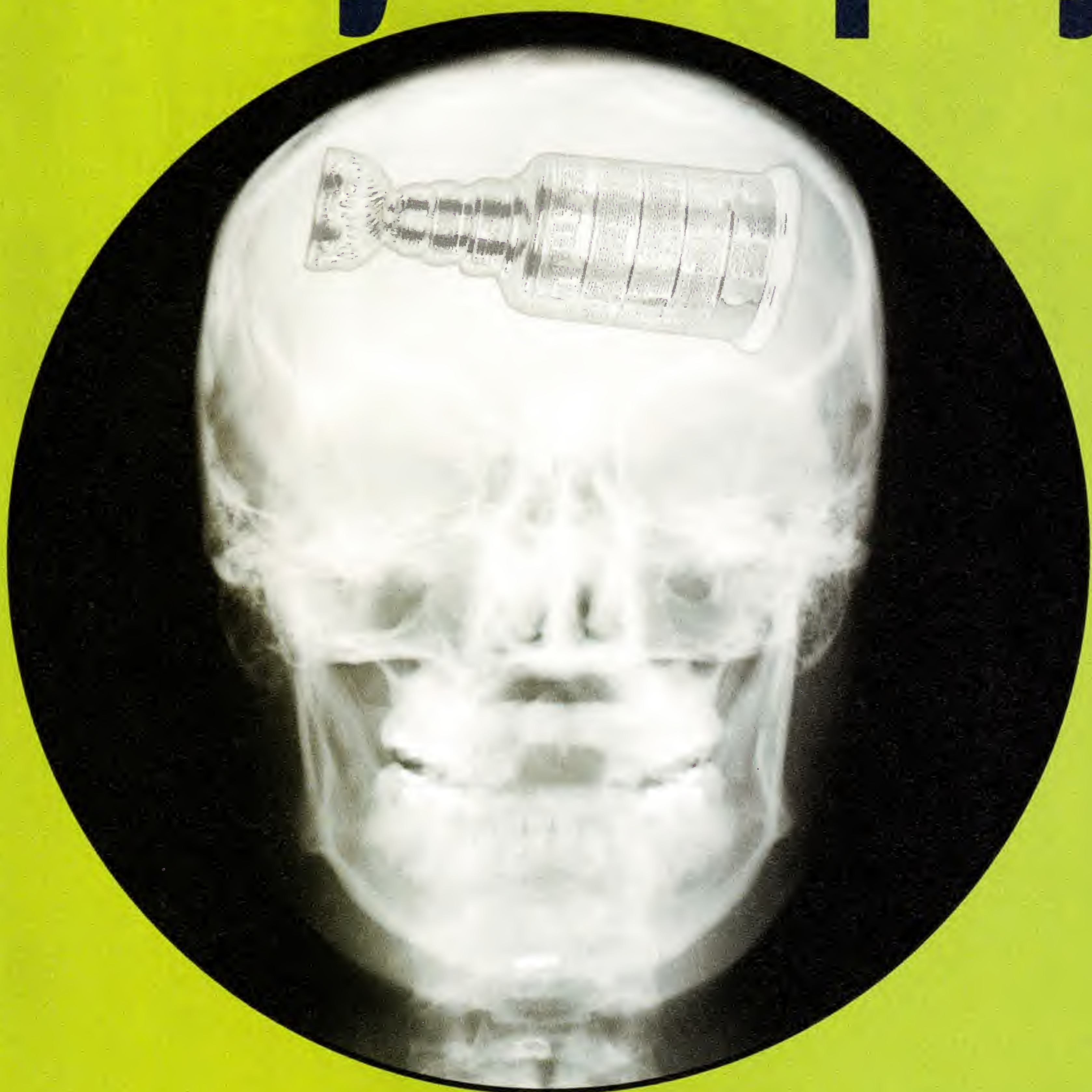
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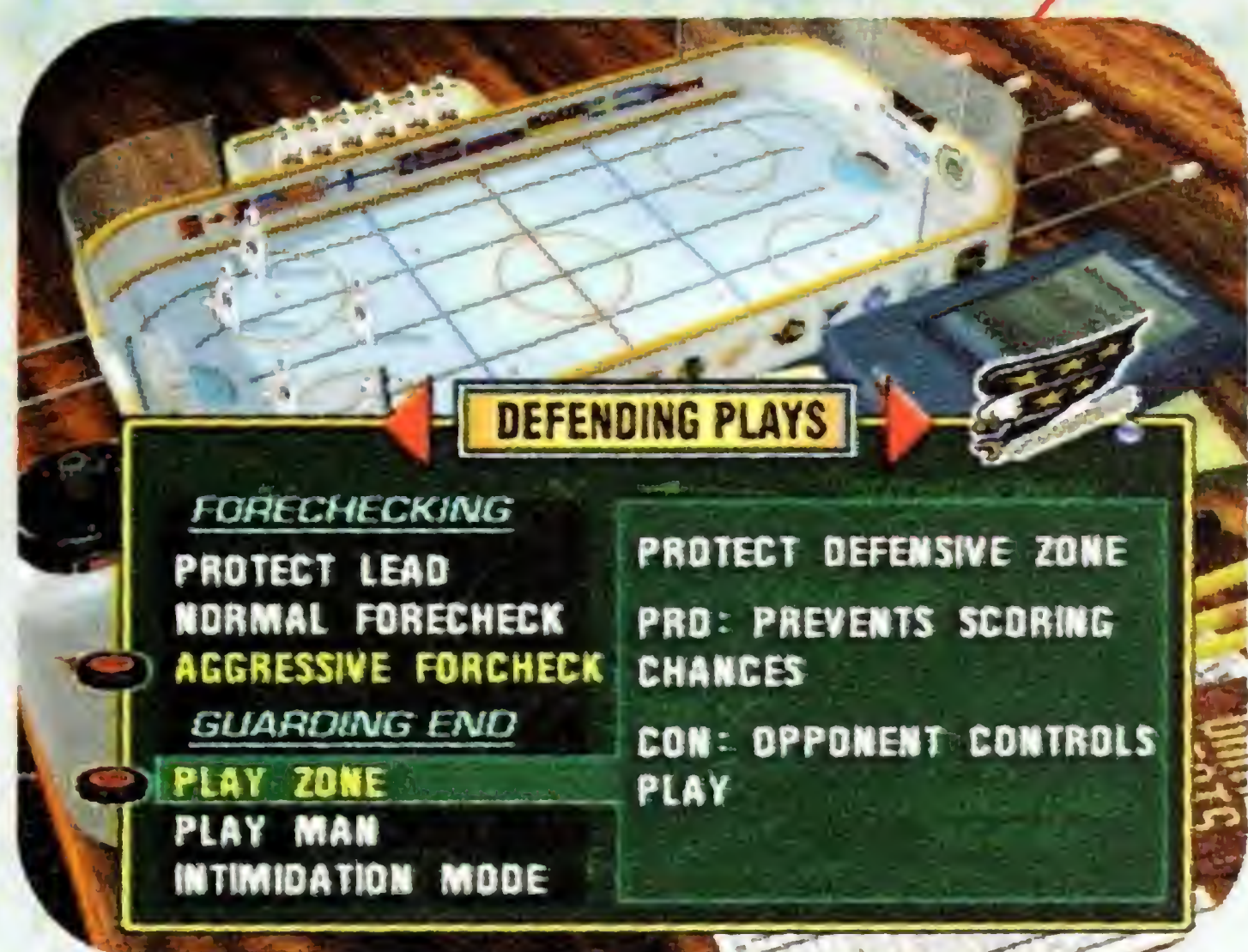
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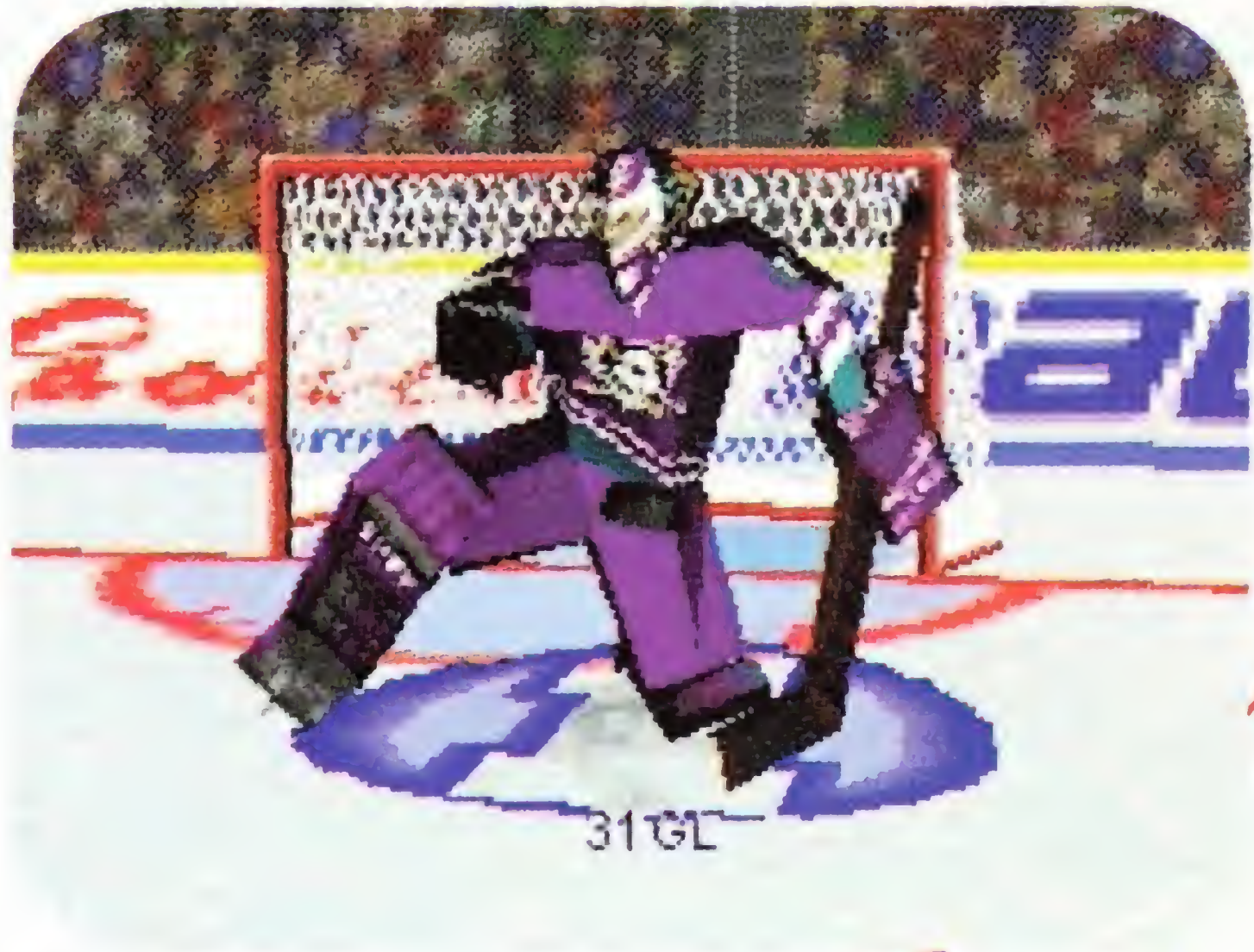
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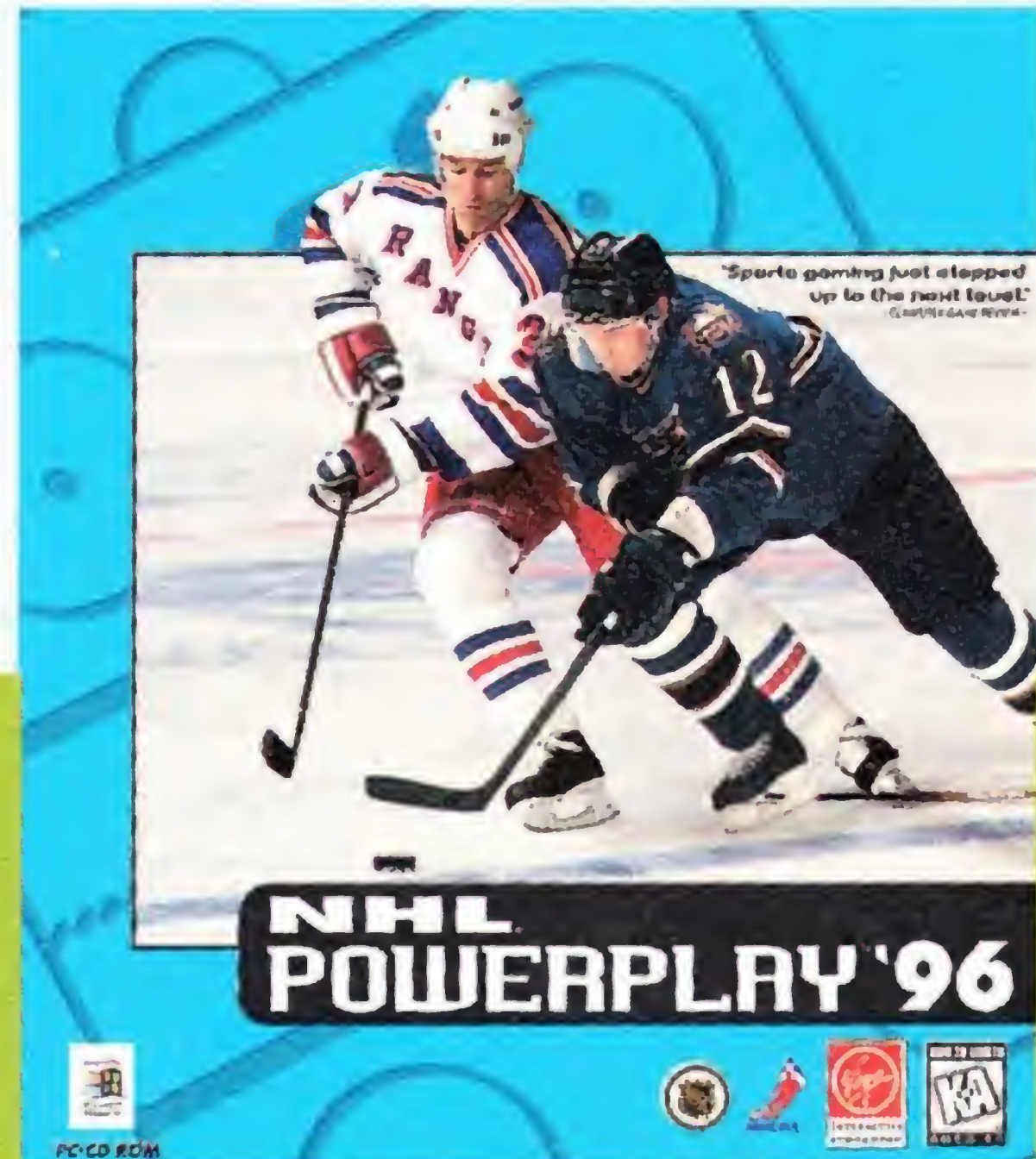
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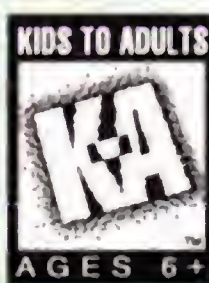
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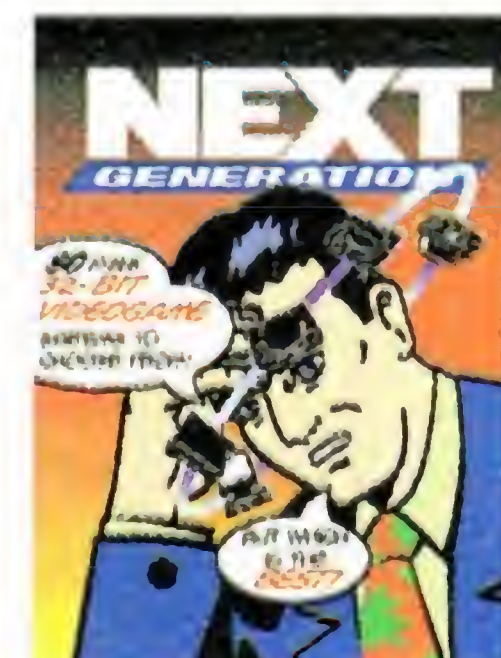
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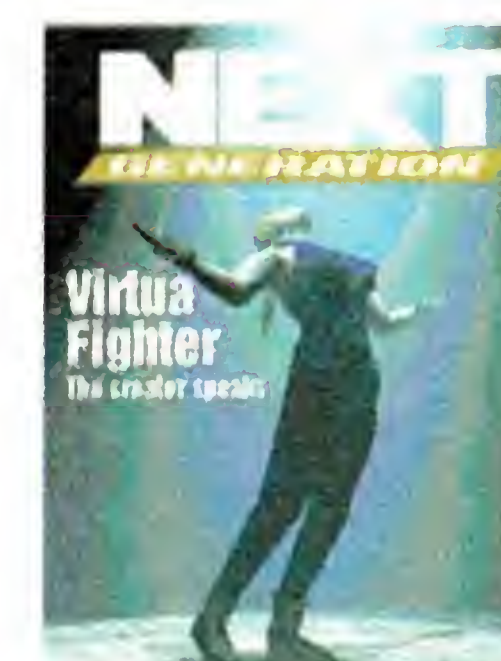


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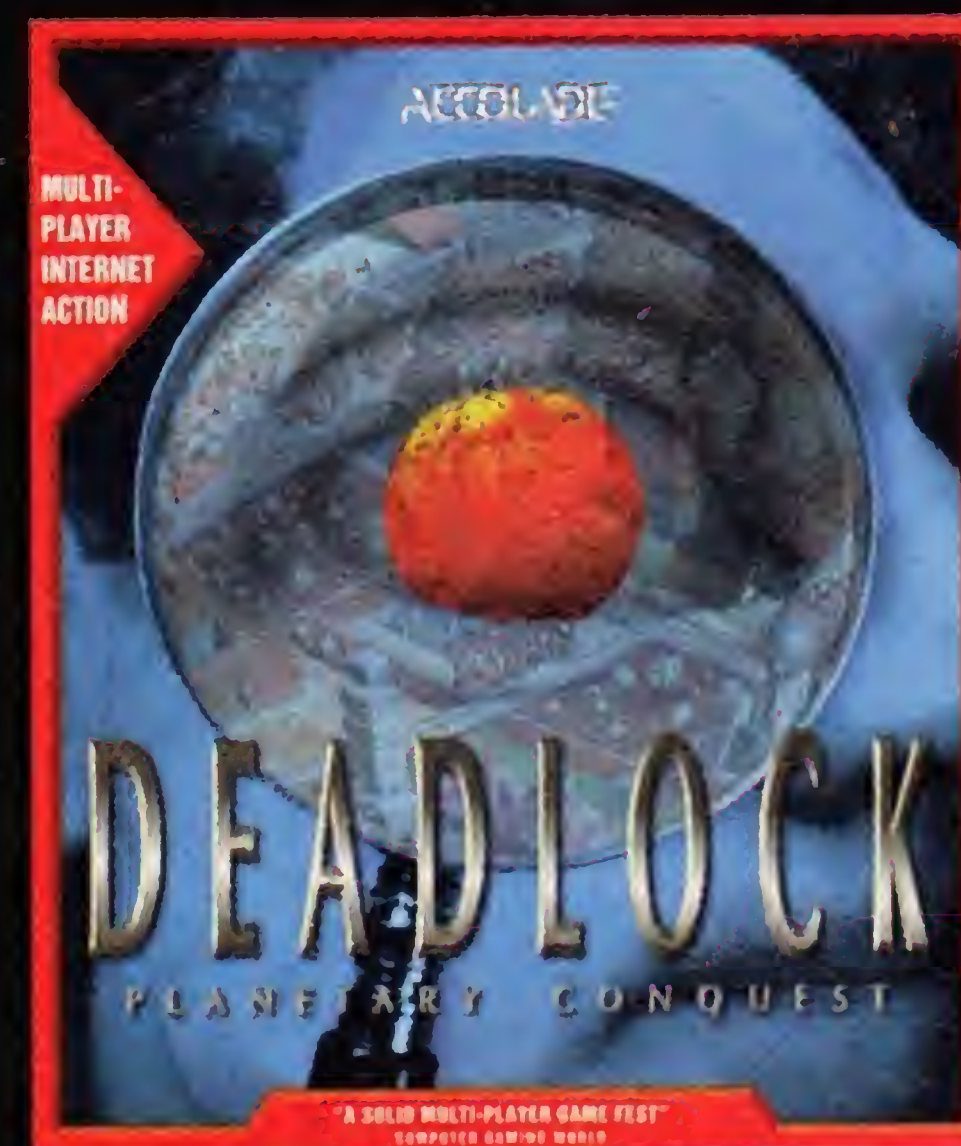
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Will DVD change the face of videogames?



Digital Video Disc (a.k.a. DVD) is the next big thing. Each disc holds seven times as much data as a CD-ROM, and they're coming to the game industry faster than you can say "73 hours of full-motion video." So do gamers really need DVD? And if they don't, why is everyone so excited by it?



Technology will always evolve, and data storage technology is no exception. In 1996, just as the world is enjoying a worldwide "standard" in the shape of compact discs (nobody mention Nintendo), those with an eye to the future are talking about CD's successor, Digital Video Disc (DVD). DVDs are small silver discs, the same size as CDs, but are capable of holding seven times more data, and — perhaps more importantly — capable of reading that data from the disk up to 30 times quicker.

This is a big deal because many experts believe that DVD technology will be the key to finally realizing a dream that those in the consumer electronics business have cherished for a long time: that of the all-in-one, sits-on-top-of-the-TV, "little black box" that does *everything*. The dream is that this "little black box" will replace a home's VCR, cable box, game machine, PC, telephone, answering machine, and probably a lot more besides, all in one. CDs just aren't up to the job (we all know what video played off a CD is like — and besides, CDs aren't recordable). DVD, however, is up to the job, and while this mythical "little black box" may still be just a glint in some Japanese engineer's eye, what is certain is that DVD is destined to slowly but surely replace CDs in all applications, and that before the end of 1996 there will be DVD-based products in US stores. DVD movies are destined to replace videocassettes, DVD music discs are



Games like *11th Hour* may no longer arrive on four CDs. But who really wants more FMV in their games?

DVD: the specs

The following specifications make up the current standard for DVD, as agreed by all major electronics manufacturers.

Disc Diameter: 120 mm (5 inches)
Disc Thickness: 1.2 mm (0.6 mm x 2)
Memory Capacity: 4.7 gigabytes
Track Pitch: 0.74 micrometer
Laser Diode Wavelength: 650/635 nm
Numerical Aperture: 0.6
Error Correction: RS-PC (Reed Solomon Product Code)
Signal Modulation: 8-16
Data Transfer Rate: 4.69 Mbit/second average for image and sound
Image Compression: MPEG2
Audio: Dolby AC3 (5.1 ch), LCPM for NTSC and MPEG Audio 5.1 channel and 7.1 channel, LCPM for PAL/SECAM (A maximum of eight audio channels and 32 subtitle channels can be stored)
Running Time (movies): 133 minutes per side including three audio channels and four subtitle channels
File Management Structure: Micro UDF and ISO-9660

ng hardware



3DO is in ongoing negotiations with Matsushita to make DVD machines with the M2 chip inside

destined to replace conventional CDs, and — you guessed it — DVD-ROMs are destined to replace CD-ROMs, and that means (dear game player) that they're coming your way.

So where did DVD come from? How does it all work? And just what time frame are we talking about, anyway? It's time to take a look at the origins of this new technology, and then a look at what game players can expect from it.

DVDs are capable of holding seven times more data than CDs, and are capable of reading that data up to 30 times quicker

DVD's origins are complicated, and the format has been fraught with difficulties since its conceptual debut. As with any new mass-market format, the reward to an individual company for coming up with and owning the rights to The Next Big Thing are huge. As such, many different formats, designs, and standards have been proposed throughout DVD's prolonged conception, each from different companies looking to blaze its own trail. However, an announcement was made late last year revealing that the Sony/Philips camp and Time Warner/Toshiba/Matsushita camp had reached an agreement on a standard DVD spec after Microsoft and a group of other software developers gave testimonials on the importance of a uniform standard. The group of developers threatened that they would not support any format unless there

was a uniform standard [NG 11]. The two rival camps laid down their guns and released a somewhat vague, uniform specification for DVD with which each said it was happy. So a VHS versus Betamax-style format war would seem to have been averted, at least for now.

The first DVD-based machines to arrive in the home will be noninteractive DVD movie players, which are expected to ship this fall. These machines will be capable of playing 133 minutes of MPEG2 (higher than broadcast quality) video and three channel audio with four subtitle channels on most TVs.

The DVD movie players are expected to hit the market for around \$500, and we're told that the studios in Hollywood are very excited about their arrival. As with video laser discs, you will be able to search and jump to different earmarks on the disc (which is a vast improvement over the lengthy forward and reverse winding of conventional videotapes). But DVD won't fully replace VCRs until you can record onto discs, as well as play off them. This recordable technology (DVD-R) isn't that far away, and the debate over the right to reproduce content has many in tinsel town

quite worried. Hollywood is naturally concerned when perfect copies of movies can be made at home with simply a DVD player, a DVD-R unit, a blank disc, and the press of a button.

Similar pressure from creative content providers in the past has led to other digital-recording technologies (such as DAT and Sony MiniDisc) being hampered by blank discs or tapes costing as much as prerecorded ones. Let's hope a similar move doesn't hamper DVD-R's progress to the home environment.

Next will come the first interactive DVD-ROM drives for the PC market. These could possibly arrive as early as later this year.

To incorporate a DVD-ROM drive within a conventional PC set-up, however, users will have to spend some money. In addition to the new DVD drive itself (\$300 to \$400), users will have to add MPEG2 and AC3 (six-channel surround sound) decoders, plus 150 MHz Pentium CPUs (all of which will cost hundreds of dollars).

This has led some of the folks in the hardware development camps to consider treating the arrival of DVD with far more importance than a mere add-on. Because



The PC DVD set-up is essentially the same as with CD-ROMs, with a few minor exceptions. Your new PC set-up will need a massive upgrade in processing; anything less than a Pentium won't do much good

What the DVD numbers mean

S

o far, the only DVD spec that has been released is one general and vague outline for both the DVD movie player and DVD-ROM drive (p. 37).

This spec was agreed upon by the two competing camps, Philips/Sony and Time Warner/Toshiba/Matsushita, after software developers demanded a uniform standard (NG 11). Many believe that in order for DVD to catch on, all drives and players must be cross-compatible from the very beginning, without exception. That would also include backward compatibility from CD-ROMs to DVD-ROMs (your new player must be able to play your old discs).

Although it is somewhat vague, the spec does reveal the basic parameters and technologies of DVD. Its 4.7 GB storage capacity is certainly a considerable improvement over the 0.65 GB of CD-ROMs, as is its 4.69 megabits-per-second average transfer rate (a single speed CD-ROM player reads data at a rate of just 0.15 megabits-per-second). This improvement in performance, however, will require additional processing muscle in the host machine to handle all the data. Consumer DVD movie players will need to include MPEG2 and AC3 audio decoding solutions, and it is anticipated that nothing short of a 150 MHz Pentium will make full use of a DVD-ROM player for a PC.

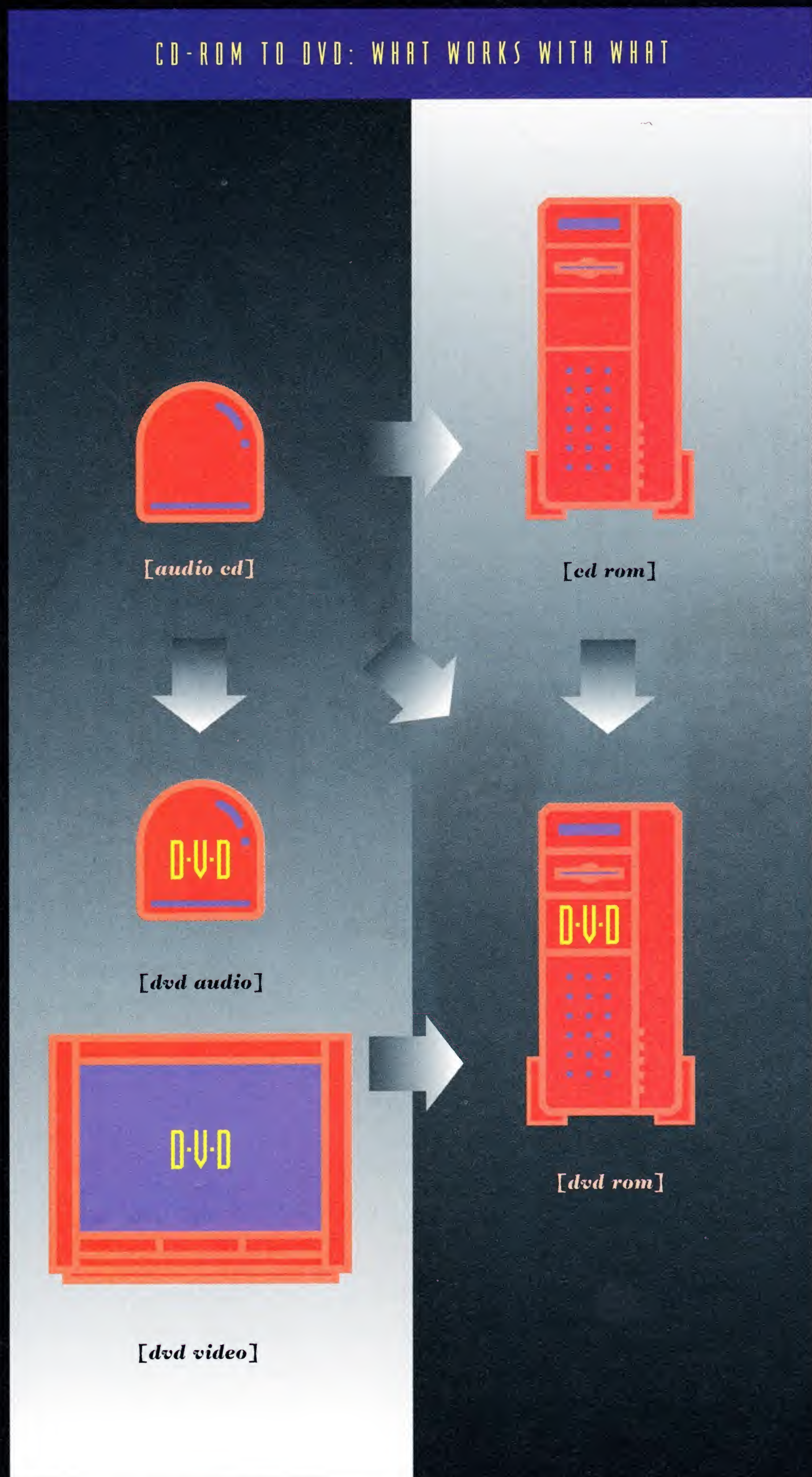
Perhaps DVD's main advantage will be in the fact that the option exists to make the discs recordable. Some companies have said that they are working to make their first DVD-ROM drives off the production line recordable. And erasable DVD-ROMs, if they aren't shipped initially, are expected to ship on an OEM (Original Equipment Manufacture) basis soon after. Another issue to be ironed out is whether or not the discs will be able to store data on just one side or both sides of the disc. In the original spec from the Time Warner/Toshiba/Matsushita camp, the discs was planned as two sided. At press time, however, the two-sided configuration was being considered only as "possible."

Of course, the whole issue of price is perhaps the major hurdle still to be negotiated by those wishing to rush DVD to market. Will the technology be affordable enough to attract widespread adoption?

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DVD developers' all-encompassing goal is to make the DVD-ROM drive capable of playing all audio discs, CD-ROMs, and DVD movie discs

CD-ROM TO DVD: WHAT WORKS WITH WHAT



DVD game consoles?

DVD players will make their debuts as movie playback machines and (possibly recordable) DVD-ROM drives for PCs. A technology as new as DVD is typically too expensive to be of interest to console manufacturers such as Sega and Sony, which have to keep hardware costs as low as possible (PlayStation and Sega Saturn are the first true mass-market CD-based game consoles, yet CD-ROM technology is more than 10 years old).

Having said this, all the major console manufacturers are watching DVD's approach with varying degrees of interest. All but Nintendo agree that DVD is the future for the game industry. Spokespersons from all of the companies have expressed the belief that while DVD, in and of itself, could probably not revolutionize gaming, if it facilitates the creation of an all-in-one home entertainment system, gaming will then inevitably be affected as a consequence.

Along with Sega, The 3DO Company is expressing the most interest in DVD. The company has apparently placed itself in a "DVD as soon as possible" position, with the hopes that DVD will become an integral part of its 64-bit M2 system. To ensure its inclusion at the earliest possible opportunity, 3DO is investing resources in finding MPEG2 and AC3 decoding solutions. In addition to DVD being the drive of choice in the future home entertainment system, the

folks at 3DO feel that it may bring some unity and, perhaps even, cross-compatibility, to the dedicated gaming market (which presently has none).

"DVD has the promise of solving some of the big problems," says Toby Farrand, senior vice president in hardware engineering and operations at The 3DO Company. "The market is so fragmented, there is no critical mass on one platform for developers to rally around. The alliance of DVD holds the possibility of creating some consolidation around the industry."

The folks at Sega are almost, but not quite as, enthusiastic about the arrival of DVD as those at 3DO. Sega's exact plans for the new format have not yet been revealed, but the company has announced that it is working to develop a DVD prototype system with Matsushita (anyone remember those Sega/M2 rumors?). Spokespersons from Sega have also expressed the hope that DVD will be a unifying format for which game developers can write. With that in mind, they make no bones about the fact that they feel Nintendo is, once again, bucking the system by not endorsing DVD and, therefore, rejecting yet another disc format. "The interesting thing about it is, this little shiny disc format has become the gold standard as it relates to next-generation experiences," says Mike Ribero, executive vice president and general manager of the consumer products division of Sega of America.

Despite the fact that Sony was one of the four companies to develop the DVD spec and, subsequently, has brought it on to the front burner for hardware development, it has no immediate plans to create a DVD game machine, be it 32-bit or 64-bit based. Instead, the company has announced that it will keep its money on the current CD-dependent 32-bit PlayStation.

With no plans to develop either a DVD- or any disc-dependent game machine in the near future, Nintendo is without a doubt the most apathetic of the bunch in regard to the new format. A spokesperson had no comment on DVD, instead offering that "We have our hands full with Nintendo 64 and our other gaming systems."

of the revolutionary performance increase (in movie playback capability, just for starters) and the high cost of embracing DVD's ancillary technology, a full-system upgrade campaign — similar to Intel's campaign to promote the Pentium processor — is necessary.

"The main reason," explains Tom Jones, director of engineering at Toshiba, "is that the OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) channel will be able to fully integrate DVD. I think there will also be an upgrade market, and there won't be a lot of leftover product." He's saying that this is something that ain't gonna be a hard sell.

Support for DVD from the dedicated game machine manufacturers, however, is not entirely as enthusiastic. In fact, the dedicated game companies like Sega and Sony, and in particular, Nintendo, show a range of reaction ranging from optimism to downright pessimism. This is understandable, seeing that all but one of these companies has a CD-ROM based system to sell for a couple of more years at least (the last thing they want is to acknowledge that their storage format of choice may soon be out of date). Also, a natural reluctance to being incorporated

The first DVD-based machines to arrive in the home will be the first noninteractive DVD movie players, expected ship this fall

into the "little black box" all-in-one concept may also be part of the rationale behind a perceived lack of enthusiasm.

Either way, it would appear that although the first DVD machine will appear this fall with Toshiba's movie-playing DVD unit, it may be some time (as long as two to three years) before console gaming companies embrace DVD.

A spokesperson for Nintendo told **Next Generation** that DVD will not change the company's cartridge-based approach (as one might expect from the only next-generation game company yet to embrace CD-ROMs). And even Sony has taken a very relaxed approach to the DVD standard it helped create. As far as future TV-top systems, a spokesperson from Sony says, "The life cycle of the PlayStation hopefully will be four to six more years."



Boards like this enabled CD-ROMs to play FMV. DVDs will hold 75% data more than CD-ROMS



Although Philips' CD-i was a flop, the company is an integral player in making DVD a success

We are always looking at new technology and Sony developed DVD, so it clearly will be a consideration at one point." But for now, Sony is sticking by the successful CD-ROM based PlayStation.

Sega and The 3DO Company, on the other hand, have expressed much more enthusiasm for the new standard than their competitors. For now, however, Sega will only say that it is "looking at DVD very enthusiastically," and working with Matsushita on the technology. "If there is any skepticism, it's about *when*," says Mike Ribero, executive vice president and general manager of the consumer products division of Sega of America.

Ribero will not reveal when Sega plans to release its first DVD-based machine. Still, he remains optimistic, and says that Sega believes that DVD could revolutionize home entertainment and gaming. "Many of the games today come on a CD-ROM and only use half the disc," he explains. "But DVD will serve as the catalyst for the consolidation of the home entertainment systems. With DVD, you will be able to consolidate all the devices on top of your television set: the game machine, the CD player, and the VCR. If you can consolidate it into one machine at an affordable price, it becomes very attractive." And this will then drive and promote DVD's use in other areas, such as gaming.

Another company with enthusiasm for (and, apparently, resources behind) DVD is The 3DO Company. Toby Farrand, senior vice president of hardware engineering and operation at 3DO, says that the company is not only excited about DVD, but has dedicated resources to research and development of DVD decoding solutions, to place the company ahead of the DVD

DVD does everything...

Clearly, DVD is still in the embryonic phase of its life. Although it is still too early to say when it will arrive for a particular platform, be it movie player, PC or other

manifestation, it's not entirely speculative to say that DVD will attempt to take over all forms of storage media as we know it.

DVD MOVIE PLAYER

DVD will make its debut as a movie player. Dubbed the DVD player, the current specifications dictate that this particular DVD device will be able to play 133 minutes of MPEG2 (higher than broadcast quality) video and three channel audio with four subtitle channels on your television — from just one disc. Like video laser discs, you will be able to search and jump to different earmarks on the disc. The DVD movie players are expected to hit the market for around \$500 this fall.

Although the studios in Hollywood have announced their support for the DVD movie player, the debate over the right to reproduce content (with DVD-ROM drives being recordable and compatible with the movie player) has many Hollywood executives quite worried.

DVD-ROM

Shortly after the DVD movie player hits the market, the first DVD-ROM drives will ship for the PC. Initially, these units are expected to retail for somewhere between \$400 and \$600 dollars. With a storage capacity of 4.7 gigabytes (versus CD-ROMs which hold 0.65 gigabytes) and vastly increased data transfer rates, the DVD-ROM will offer developers the chance to produce titles with broadcast-quality video and surround-sound audio. In addition to the more immersive sound and video, the increased storage capacity will enable

the developers to place more levels and/or more complex databases in their titles. Philips, Sony, Toshiba, Matsushita, and NEC are expected to be the first manufacturers to hit the market with a DVD drive.

DVD GAME ROM

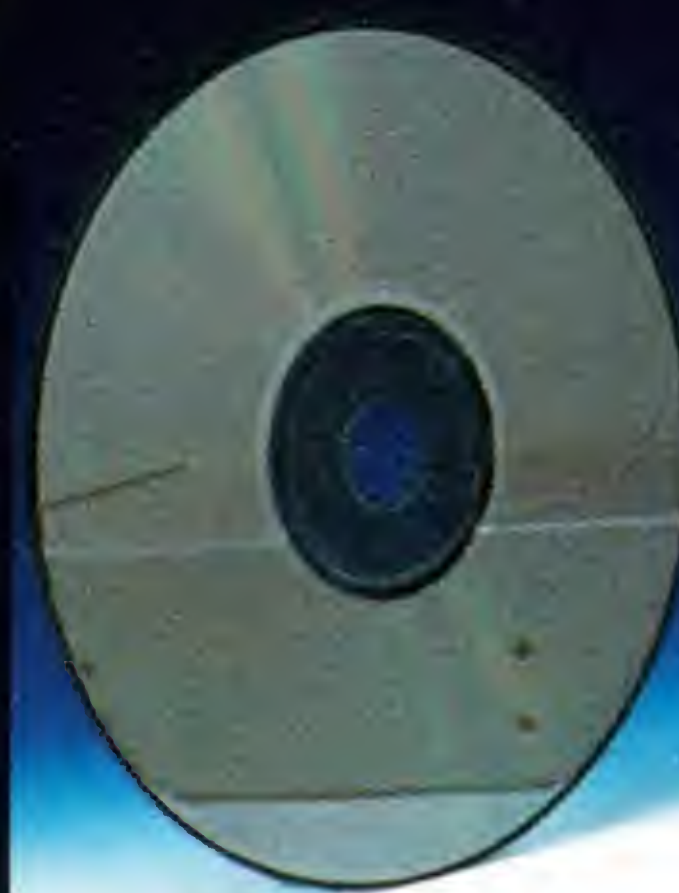
Like CD-ROM and CD-dependent game machines, there will be no real difference in the physical make-up between the DVD-ROM drives available for PCs, and DVD GAME ROM units that will eventually become part of dedicated game machines. When will DVD game machines appear? In general, it seems that the gaming manufacturers are content to wait on the sidelines for now and to let the folks on the PC side struggle with early compatibility and pricing issues. Representatives from 3DO, Sony, and Sega, however, have indicated they aren't going to wait too long.

SUPER CD (DVD AUDIO)

Last, but not least, is the possibility of a DVD audio disc. The majority of current audio CDs, like many games on CD, do not use the entire space on their current media, and so the demand for DVD audio discs is almost nonexistent. The opportunity exists, however, to do more with audio DVD, especially if it is compatible with the recordable DVD-ROM drive. If those capabilities come to fruition, people will be able to record hours of digital audio onto a disc at their discretion. In that sense, the DVD audio and DVD-ROM would elevate the disc medium to a place that the CD never evolved to en masse: serving as a viable storage medium.

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The first DVD movie player (\$500) will appear on US shelves this fall by Toshiba. Whether they will be backward compatible with CD-ROM players isn't certain yet



ng hardware

learning curve. "M2 was designed knowing that we would make it a DVD capable player," says Farrand. "What we are doing with M2 is anticipating what will need to be done to make a DVD system with a minimum cost increase. We are in place technically to do an M2 DVD."

The 3DO Company may also see DVD as a means of wiping the game industry's slate clean, with a view to a 3DO-generated machine getting another bite at the pie. "Strategically, we think DVD's important," admits Farrand. "Because the 32-bit platform is still-born, the [game] market is fragmented and, in total, it's disappointing for everyone. We see the 64-bit generation as a major leap, especially with the DVD media."

Another hurdle faced by DVD is the need of an adequate amount of DVD movies, games, and software, to make a DVD player purchase more attractive. The DVD dream isn't miles away from what was promised by Philips with CD-i, or indeed The 3DO Company's MultiPlayer, but both of these formats failed partly due to a lack of software support.

To prevent history from repeating itself, developers must rise to the challenge

Nintendo's decision not to embrace even CD-ROMs is testament to the fact that games shouldn't be judged on the size of their data

of producing software that makes specific use of DVD's strengths. Unfortunately for gamers, while this potentially means shorter loading times, surround sound, and no more multidisc games, it basically means more video. Lots more video. Tons of it.

The jury from the developer community is still out on DVD. A spokesperson from a software developer, who wishes to remain anonymous, went so far as to say that his company is "apathetic" about DVD, and called it "just another CD-ROM." The same person, however, conceded that "it will eventually be supported." Sierra On-Line and Electronic Arts are two of the few software developers which are willing to speak on the record about DVD. A spokesperson from Sierra said that the company has only two games in the works for 1996 that

feature live-action video and require multiple discs. While DVD would save the company money on manufacturing those two titles (just one disc instead of six or seven) the folks at Sierra feel as though they aren't in need of DVD right now.

Pat Becker, director of corporate communications at Electronic Arts, said that while EA is excited about DVD, it's not looking for it to take hold of the market for at least a few years. "You can add surround sound," says Becker. "And, there will be other things to exploit with the increased storage capacity. But it's years away from entering the mainstream as a gaming platform." Becker says that it will take time for DVD to make its way into a large installed consumer base and be accepted by the retail channel. Until it does, DVD software development will not be a priority. But if the standard is compatible and one company produces a sensational DVD game soon after the initial drives come to market, surely other developers will jump on the bandwagon and hunt for a piece of the action.

It would be no surprise at all, given the massive storage capacity, if the first games to come on DVD would be FMV-based, interactive movie titles. But the potential does exist to do more with DVD

than minimize the cost of multiple-disc games by cramming them onto one. According to Paul Wehrenberg, manager of advance storage devices at Apple Computers and codeveloper of a functional DVD-ROM prototype (one of few known to exist at press time), the format can do much more than house FMV. "There will be many possibilities for branching through a huge data base," says Wehrenberg. "DVD has the ability to set up content that can predict what the user wants to see evolve. And [they] can have higher sampling rates and more channels, so there will be audio coming out which is just unbelievable."

But are game developers ready to do more? **Next Generation** doesn't believe so. Nintendo's decision not to embrace even CD-ROM technology is testament to the fact that a game shouldn't be judged on the size of its data. With many of today's best games not using up half of a CD (even with soundtrack and intro sequences), the last thing we need is yet more space developers will feel obliged to fill up.

DVD is coming, there is no doubt. But what the game community chooses to do with it when it arrives remains undecided. Let's hope that some lessons have been learned from the CD-ROM experience. Either that, or we'd all better learn to appreciate FMV.

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The \$10-million *Wing Commander IV* computer game could easily have benefited from the use of DVD. The fourth of the series, *Wing Commander IV* used six discs to contain much of its lengthy FMV footage, and though many game development companies had trouble filling one CD-ROM, *WC IV* and its ilk (interactive movies like *Under a Killing Moon* and *Burn:Cycle*) are perfect for DVD

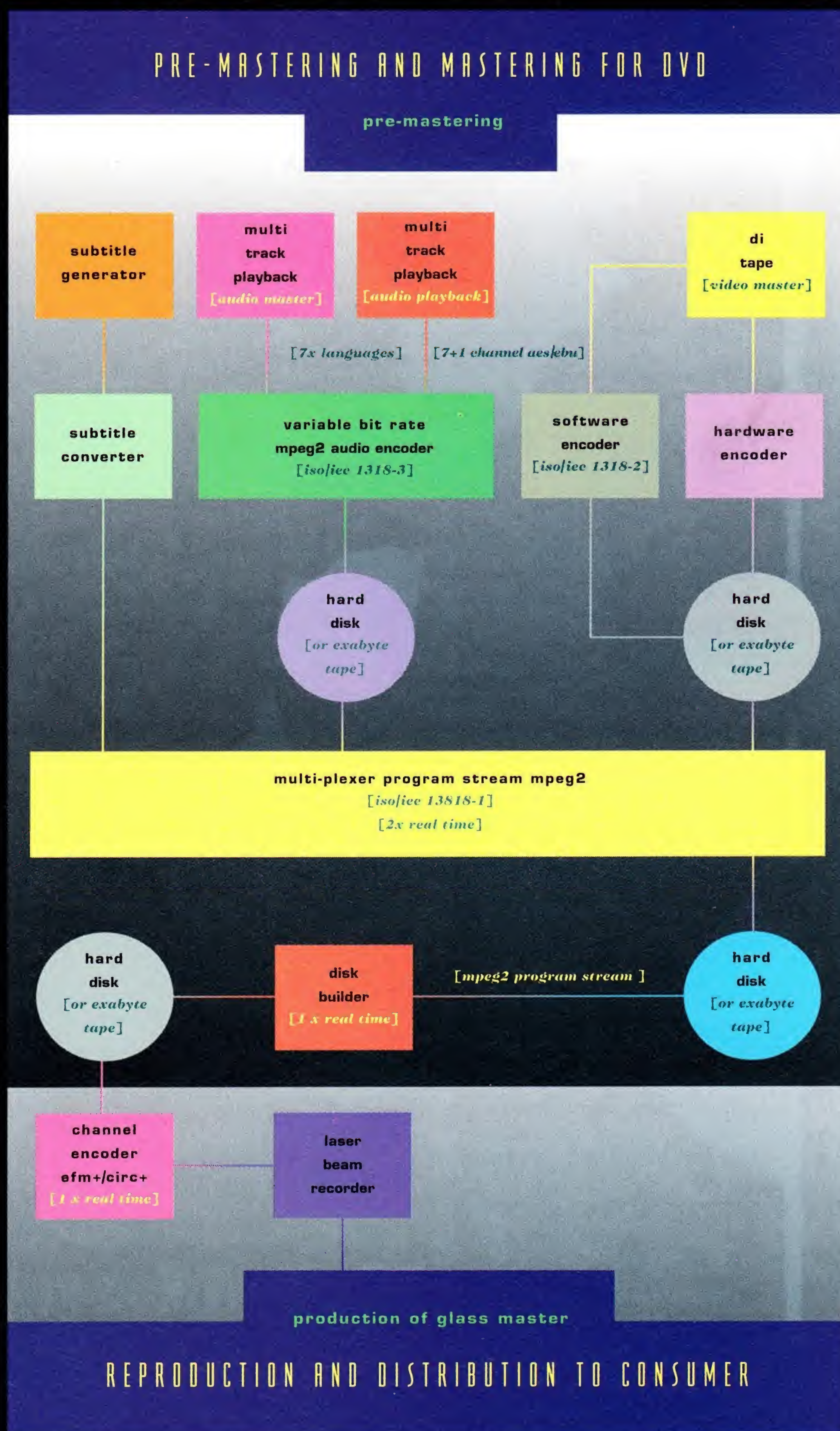
So how does DVD work?

At the heart of the DVD format lies its MPEG2 capabilities. MPEG is an acronym for the Motion Pictures Experts Group, an organization that is responsible for the establishment of industry-wide standards for video and audio compression and decompression. MPEG2 equates to broadcast-quality video and surround-sound, thus DVD offers PCs and dedicated game machines (when those manufacturers adopt DVD) the potential to deliver images and audio rivaling those found in a movie theater.

In many ways, DVD will make the production of an interactive entertainment title much easier. Developers will hopefully be able to spend less time worrying about compressing video data for storage on a CD, or trying to dodge the grainy, pixelated look of much computer-based video, and instead concentrate a little more on the quality of content. So how will it work?

The chart at right shows general premastering and mastering procedures. Video will be fed through a software or hardware encoder to a hard disk or the more portable Exabyte tape. The audio can be divided in several ways. From 7+1 channel audio to Dolby Prologic to digital surround sound, the source tracks must be fed through a variable bit rate AC3 audio encoder. Once they have been encoded, the sound files, like the video master, will make their way to a massive storage medium. In addition to DVD's extended sight and sound features, developers also will be able to make a "world" disc that will include subtitles. Subtitles will run directly through a subtitle converter where they will meet up with the encoded audio and sound files in the MPEG2 program stream multiplexer.

Once the files have caught up to each other in the multiplexer, the output is fed to a disk builder where it is converted into a disc image. The output of each (audio encoding, video encoding, multiplexing, and disk building) are stored, and then all the data is swept through a channel encoder before it all reaches its final destination, the laser beam recorder.



In addition to creating more material for a title, Digital Video Discs will mean new methods of encoding audio and video for software developers. MPEG2 will bring broadcast-quality video into the mix with its MPEG2 capacity. Encoding MPEG2 requires a new path and a new encoding unit, which has been estimated to cost as much as \$50,000. DVD also means expanded audio with the arrival of AC3. In addition to a new encoding process, AC3 requires some creative and technical preplanning on the part of the developer, since it offers a variety of possibilities and channels (6+1 surround sound audio)

YOU'LL TAKE MALONE TO THE HOLE.

YOU'LL DRAIN THREES AT THE BUZZER.

YOU'LL BE IDOLIZED BY WOMEN.

YEAH, AND THEN YOU'LL WAKE UP.

U R NOT

KIDD

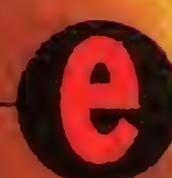
EWING

HARDAWAY

OLAJUWON

KEMP

HILL



Okay, rookie. Here's

all the 3-D realism,

other wannabees—uh,

the basketball game



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My Computer



Network
Neighborhood



Recycle Bin



Games

File Edit View Help



Close Combat



Deadly Tide



Hellbender



Monster Truck Madness



My Com



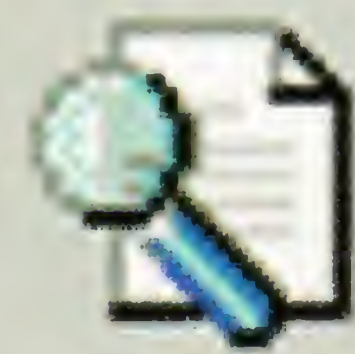
Programs



Documents



Settings



Find



Help



Run...



Shut Down...



Accessories



StartUp



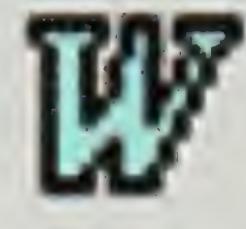
Microsoft Encarta '95



Microsoft Excel



Microsoft Exchange



Microsoft Word



MS-DOS Prompt



The Microsoft Network



Microsoft Games

Windows 95



My Computer



Microsoft Games

What's Microsoft's game?



Bill Gates' Microsoft is the biggest consumer software company in the world. It has a reputation for winning — some would say at any cost. And now this giant corporate predator has turned a hungry eye to the game industry. So should gamers tremble or rejoice? And what's Microsoft's real agenda? A Next Generation report



Microsoft is corporate evil incarnate: a predatory, domineering software giant known for strong-arm tactics in the distribution channels, and late, slow, feature-laden (but otherwise derivative) software. It is a company whose Windows operating system — its flagship product — seems almost purposefully designed to waste processor cycles and RAM. Yet it thrives in a dog-eat-dog market where brute business muscle and a strong stomach for screwing competitors are almost as important to success as superior products.

Such is the way many on the Internet and in the computer and popular press would have you think of Bill Gates' wildly successful giant Microsoft corporation.

The game industry better beware. How can such a bruiser of a company succeed in the fast-moving game market without resorting to the same strong-arm tactics that have sparked recent numerous anti-trust investigations? Will Microsoft use its muscle in



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the marketing and distribution departments to ensure that conservative (read: lame) Microsoft games receive valuable shelf space? Will the capricious Windows 95 be forced down game developers' throats? Will the PC gaming world collapse, crippled by the weight of a slow, uninspired games library, dragged to its knees by a need to run through a shoddy, buggy, cumbersome interface?

And so on, and so on. To hear the conspiracy theorists and cynics talk, one would expect a visit to the Microsoft HQ in Bellevue, Washington to resemble a journey to the pits of Hades itself.

Time for a reality check. When one steps out of the emotional shoes of a nervous PC enthusiast and begins to look rationally at the relationship between Microsoft and gaming, a very different picture emerges. Most of the fears about Microsoft come not from any actual insidious plots being hatched at the company's corporate headquarters, but rather from a lack of knowledge about Microsoft's real plans — and capabilities. When examined in detail, Microsoft's gaming itinerary looks less like the machinations of some evil corporate entity and more like what it is — a comprehensive strategy from a huge company that wants to be sure it has a presence in every possible area of profitability. Monopolies aren't as easy to maintain as they used to be. Occasionally it takes some hard work to keep stockholders in the manner in which they have no doubt become accustomed.

That's not to say that Microsoft isn't a bullying, aggressive organization with world domination on its mind. Indeed, it could well be. But even if Microsoft wanted to monopolize the entertainment software industry, it's far from clear that it could. Despite what appears to be the company's best efforts, Microsoft has not yet managed to dominate the PC business software world (although its success in another area — PR dominance of the popular press — may keep a casual observer from noting that). It has almost no presence in desktop publishing, and in some areas it has especially targeted, like personal finance, it has lost out (in this case to Intuit's *Quicken*).

More importantly, Microsoft may find that its unique skill base and experience is unsuited to a full-scale assault on the game world. Unlike the business software market, which to a large degree is iterative (improvements are made to the original

program with each successive version) the game software market is dynamic and unpredictable. A game can grow from being an idea, to a paper napkin sketch, to the proverbial "Next Big Thing" in a little more than a year, with maybe a team of just 10 or less working on it. A business application "hit," like *Microsoft Word*, typically requires thousands of work-years, multiple versions, and many years of market penetration before it achieves market dominance. Sure, the rewards may be greater. But the fact remains that it's a different discipline.

There is also a great deal more elasticity of demand for games than for business software. Most people don't need two word



Microsoft's console style controller will debut this fall; it looks great, feels good in the hand, it's digital and inexpensive

processors, but how many different one-on-one fighting games do you own?

So it is doubtful that Microsoft could leverage anywhere near its full muscle in the gaming sector — it just isn't streamlined for the job. And what is certain is that even a company as enormous as Microsoft couldn't release enough quality software to keep users from looking elsewhere for titles. (Even if it could, all it would take is one slip before its leadership position was lost. Look what happened to EA, the once undisputed champion of sports games). The only company to ever come close to a stranglehold on a game market was Atari, and look what happened to it...

So what is Microsoft actually up to, and how will it approach the industry? Its game strategy is basically three tiered. In ascending order of importance they are development tools, consumer software, and promoting Windows 95 and Windows NT as game platforms.

Microsoft's major entry in the development tools market is via Softimage, producer of arguably the premier 3D animation program on the planet. Microsoft acquired the Montreal-based Softimage in 1994 and it still functions largely as an autonomous entity. The program (also entitled *Softimage*) was written for Silicon Graphics workstations, but this January *Softimage 3.0* for Windows NT was released and this summer, version 3.5 will ship for SGI and NT.

With the purchase of Softimage, Microsoft not only acquired a very profitable software program and some of the most advanced 3D developers on the continent, but it also enabled them to port *Softimage* to Windows NT, its multiprocessor, high-end operating system. This has not only helped to increase acceptance of NT in the workstation market, but has also staked a claim for Microsoft in the high-end of the computer graphics industry, aiming directly at Silicon Graphics' huge share of the content development tools market.

It's an easy sell for Microsoft to promote *Softimage* to game developers. With a \$10,000 high-end PC system and *Softimage*, they can now do what previously required \$20,000-plus SGI machines. NT platforms can now also be used as "render farms" for SGI machines running *Softimage*. The results: SGI has lowered the prices on its lower-end systems, and there is a trend afoot in the development industry toward using the more inexpensive PC-based systems. Blue Sky, developers of *VectorMan* and a *Softimage* beta test site, still uses the four SGIs Sega bought it for *VectorMan*, but new hardware is exclusively NT based. And the savings have enabled the company to hire more artists. Microsoft reveals that more than 50% of Softimage's revenues come from the game market.

Second, Microsoft is publishing games. This is nothing new; Microsoft has been publishing games since the days of Windows 3.0, and of course, there has almost always been *Flight Simulator* (Microsoft's perennial, sleeper hit). What's new is that the game division has gone from a microscopic group (including one person working part-time on *Golf* and part-time on *Word*) in 1992, to a fully fledged division with 80-plus employees. What's more, the games themselves have gone from being "little games" (like Windows *Tetris* and *Solitaire*) to more robust products like *Fury3*.

Back to the conspiracy theorists...

OK, so this is where Microsoft quits playing fair. Microsoft can dominate shelf space in game stores — forcing its competitors out — through its distribution power. Its strategy, according to insiders, is to go to a store and, say “We think you can sell Y copies of title Z.” If the store disagrees, well, they get nothing, and miss out on all profits on selling Microsoft’s product. Result? Microsoft generally sells in Y copies of Z — and the stores then make sure they sell them. It was this strategy that enabled Microsoft to get about 7 million Win 95 upgrade kits in stores last fall, even though it only sold through about a third of them by the winter holiday season...

Certainly, Microsoft has none of the distribution headaches that plague many smaller publishers, and this fact (plus the recognized Microsoft brand name) ensures that impulse buyers alone make most Microsoft games unqualified hits. According to its own figures, right now Microsoft could release a generic game box that says “Microsoft Windows 95 Game Enclosed” and expect to sell about 400,000 units — a number that would make the average PC software publisher drool with envy.

Still, since 1994, the number of PC game products in the market has almost doubled, so it is unlikely that Microsoft

could continue to count on huge sales with volume 29 of the *Windows Entertainment Pack*. In a notion that may be almost inconceivable to most of the readers of this magazine, Microsoft has chosen to ignore us (the hard-core gamers) and focus instead on what it calls the “casual” gamer, someone who buys only five to seven titles per year. That strategy focuses on the reliability of the Microsoft brand name, as well as solid but not necessarily ground-breaking games. It will keep the company on good footing (look how well it’s worked for LucasArts). But it doesn’t seem likely to lead to some massive takeover of the industry.

Direct X: Just what’s going on?

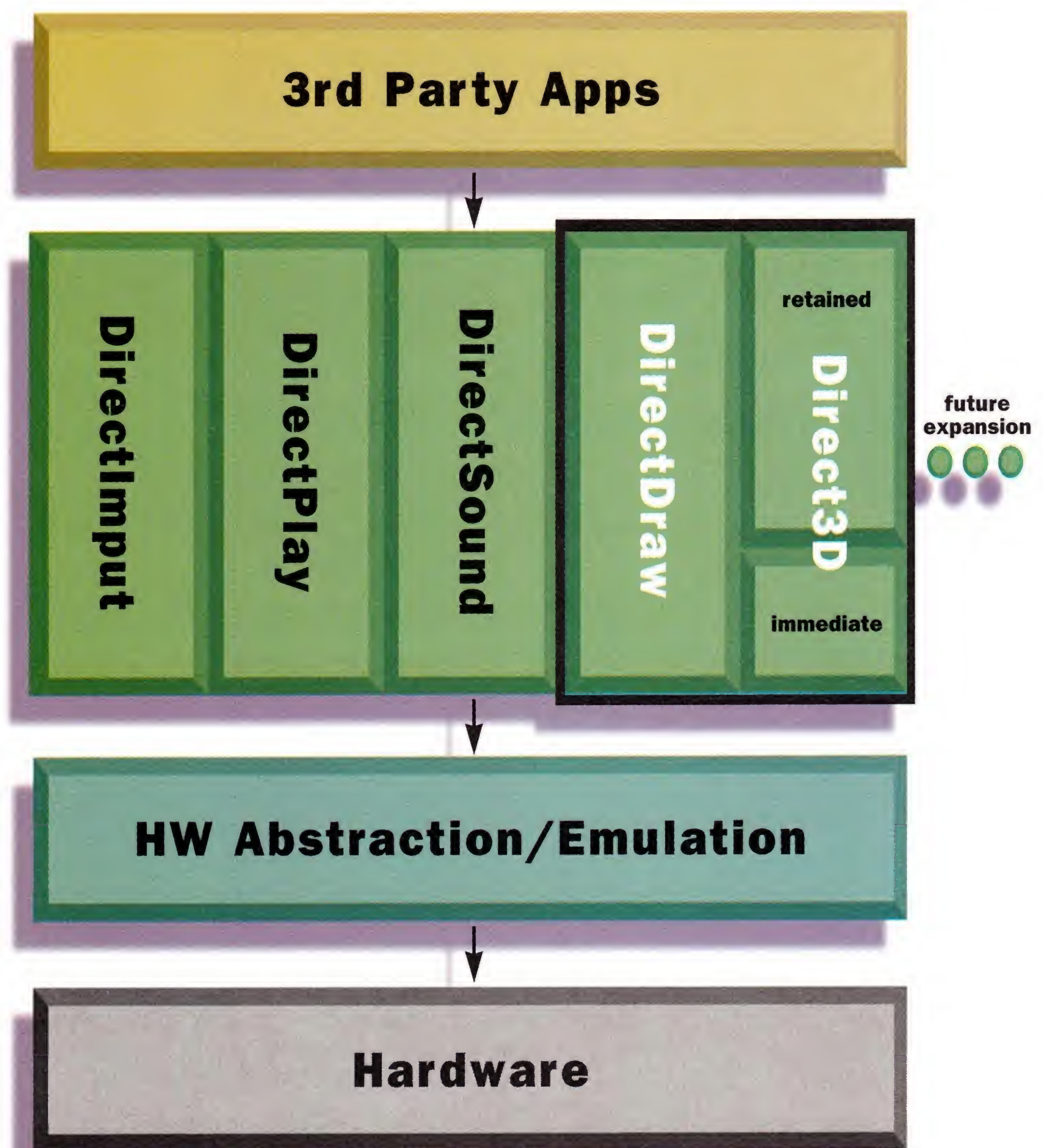


he DirectX APIs provide a software buffer between a PC’s hardware (including all add-ons, like joysticks, sound cards, and video cards) and the software

application (say, a game). By writing to the API, instead of directly to the hardware, developers can be sure that their software will function on all PCs running Win 95.

There are five elements of the DirectX API:

- 1) DirectInput provides support for digital as well as analog joysticks.
- 2) DirectPlay enables multi-player gaming by providing built in support for LANs as well as modem play, using Windows 95’s networking infrastructure.
- 3) DirectSound provides transparent, device independent access to sound cards and offloads sound processing duties (mixing, say) directly to sound hardware.
- 4) DirectDraw enables writing directly to VRAM inside a window, and supports graphics accelerators where present.
- 5) The Direct3D API (scheduled to ship this April as part of DirectX II) has three main components: A high level Retained Mode, which contains the Reality Lab 3D engine; a low-level Immediate Mode for developers who prefer to use their own 3D engines; and a hardware abstraction and emulation layer that interfaces directly with the hardware. The emulation layer will enable CPUs to emulate the features of 3D acceleration cards if they are not present. Direct3D will support Z-buffering, Gouraud shading, full-light sourcing, specular highlighting, tri-linear mip-mapping, and depth cuing.



Instructions go from applications to the API's, instead of straight to hardware. The APIs' runtime modules interpret the instructions, abstract them for given hardware, and then passes the instructions to the hardware (or emulates it if needed)

ng special

Looking forward into 1997 and beyond, Microsoft plans to continue to target the casual gamer, as well as releasing some titles that should get the attention of hard-core gamers. The most remarkable thing about Microsoft's game publishing strategy, though, is its breadth. Rather than concentrating solely on one genre, the company has products coming in the shape of sims, action, sports, strategy, rail shooters, god games, and more. See pages 53 and 54 for exclusive previews of some of these forthcoming games.

The other aspect of its gaming consumer products line is hardware, specifically joysticks and joypads. Selling game hardware is a new business for Microsoft, and one that seems to be introduced not so much for the long-term strategic benefit as much as for quick (albeit low) margin of profit. Its SideWinder joystick, which uses patented optical technology to give the benefits of both an analog and digital stick has been well received, and Microsoft also will show its game pad at E³. Bearing a striking resemblance to the Nintendo 64 pad, it is comfortable in the hand and should do well with the arcade-style games that are becoming increasingly prevalent on the PC. Microsoft also recently acquired Exos, a Massachusetts-based company that has a force-feedback joystick similar to the Immersion stick profiled in **NG 17**.

By far the most important part of Microsoft's game strategy, however, is its presentation of Windows 95 as a legitimate gaming platform, as distinct from DOS as it is from Nintendo 64 or Saturn.

The major hurdle to gaming on the PC has always been ease of use. Installing DOS games has traditionally been even more difficult than installing other PC software. With multiple standards for video cards, memory hassles created by DOS' 640 K basic memory limit, and the general user-unfriendliness of the system, getting games to actually work is sometimes more of a challenge than the games themselves. Some DOS games suffer a 35% or greater return rate simply because they cannot be successfully installed on the user's hardware.

Developing games for a DOS-based PC results in similar nightmares, as game programmers have to write routines for every single video card, sound card, and possible system set-up in advance. It's no surprise that they often failed to cover all possible combinations. And it's similarly

unsurprising that this has generally left PC games the strict domain of hard-core gamers and computer enthusiasts.

With Windows 95,

Microsoft seeks to change all this. Not only does Windows 95 make installation easier, it also makes game development easier, thanks to a series of developer APIs (Application Programming Interface) and libraries known as the Game SDK (Software Development Kit). To get the



Above are some of the graphic capabilities of Microsoft's *Softimage*. Originally for SGIs only, it now runs on Windows NT machines, with only negligible performance degradation

Game SDK, developers must simply join the Microsoft Developers' Network, which costs around \$500 per year — about the cost of goods of the CDs and manuals the average developer receives in that time. Microsoft then supplies these software libraries to game developers, making the process of developing a game designed to work within Windows 95 a whole lot easier. The major component of the SDK is the series of APIs known as DirectX (see page 49).

The main complaint about developing for Windows is that, as a program that puts

a layer of software between the hardware and the user, it simply cannot provide the performance needed for a high-speed game. To get a game to run fast under Windows, developers generally have to break all sorts of rules — resulting in the same basic headaches that occur under DOS. DirectX, by providing a set of standard APIs, fixes some of this. Microsoft has “broken the rules” of standard Windows development to gain speed (such as DirectX's ability to write straight to VRAM in a window). And as long as developers stick to the “broken rules” Microsoft has developed for the DirectX APIs (written in extremely low-level code), everything will run fine. The advance of Moore's Law (which, pared down, says that hardware keeps getting faster and cheaper) also has helped lessen complaints about performance under Windows.

By writing to the DirectX specifications, developers can be sure that their software will run on any PC running Windows 95. Microsoft takes care of the irritating task of developing drivers for all the different types of hardware that the game might be played on, not to mention doing extensive compatibility testing. The time and effort saved by being able to write to one spec also decreases development time and cost.

More importantly than just making it easier to develop and play games on a PC, the DirectX APIs make practical for the first time something that has always been possible on PCs — Plug 'n' Play, or widespread support for a variety of novel hardware. This is the single-most exciting aspect of Windows 95 as a gaming platform, and it is not an understatement to say that this could be the single-most important advance in PC gaming technology of the last decade.

Until now, if a hardware developer created or implemented a new technology, like 2D or 3D graphics acceleration, a new input device, a new sound card, or *anything* that took the PC past the stock “vanilla” stage, they would find that they had created an orphan technology, at least as far as game developers were concerned. Until the device gained enough acceptance in the marketplace (until it sold enough units), few companies would go through the trouble of writing the drivers to support it. Without the games, few upgrades were sold, and few new technologies were adopted. For example, despite the fact that practically every graphics card sold since the

introduction of the 486 has had 2D graphics acceleration, few PC games have ever taken advantage of it.

The only real standard to emerge on the PC since the days of Creative Labs' Sound Blaster card was the pathetic MPC (Multimedia PC), a Windows-based standard developed at the dawn of the multimedia age. With an MPC compliant PC, all you could really be sure of was that your machine could run the latest and greatest encyclopedia CD-ROM, but that's about it. Snore.

Now that's all different. With Microsoft developing (or more correctly, having hardware manufacturers develop) drivers for every hardware device conceivable, developers can now blithely write to the spec and not worry about supporting various hardware elements. If additional hardware is there, DirectX will

sense it and use it. If not, the CPU will emulate the missing hardware. (When possible. If you have no sound card, there's not much the DirectSound is going to be

An internal Microsoft estimate is that 40% of the time a home PC is on, it's running a game

able to do with a stock PC speaker).

Not every developer, however, is totally thrilled with the Game SDK. "I like to access everything," says one. "Now we're going to have to put our stuff into a 'black box.' It's kind of disconcerting to have that control taken away from you."

It's also important to note that because DirectX's features are present in software, fairly powerful machines are needed to be able to take advantage of DirectX in any practical way.

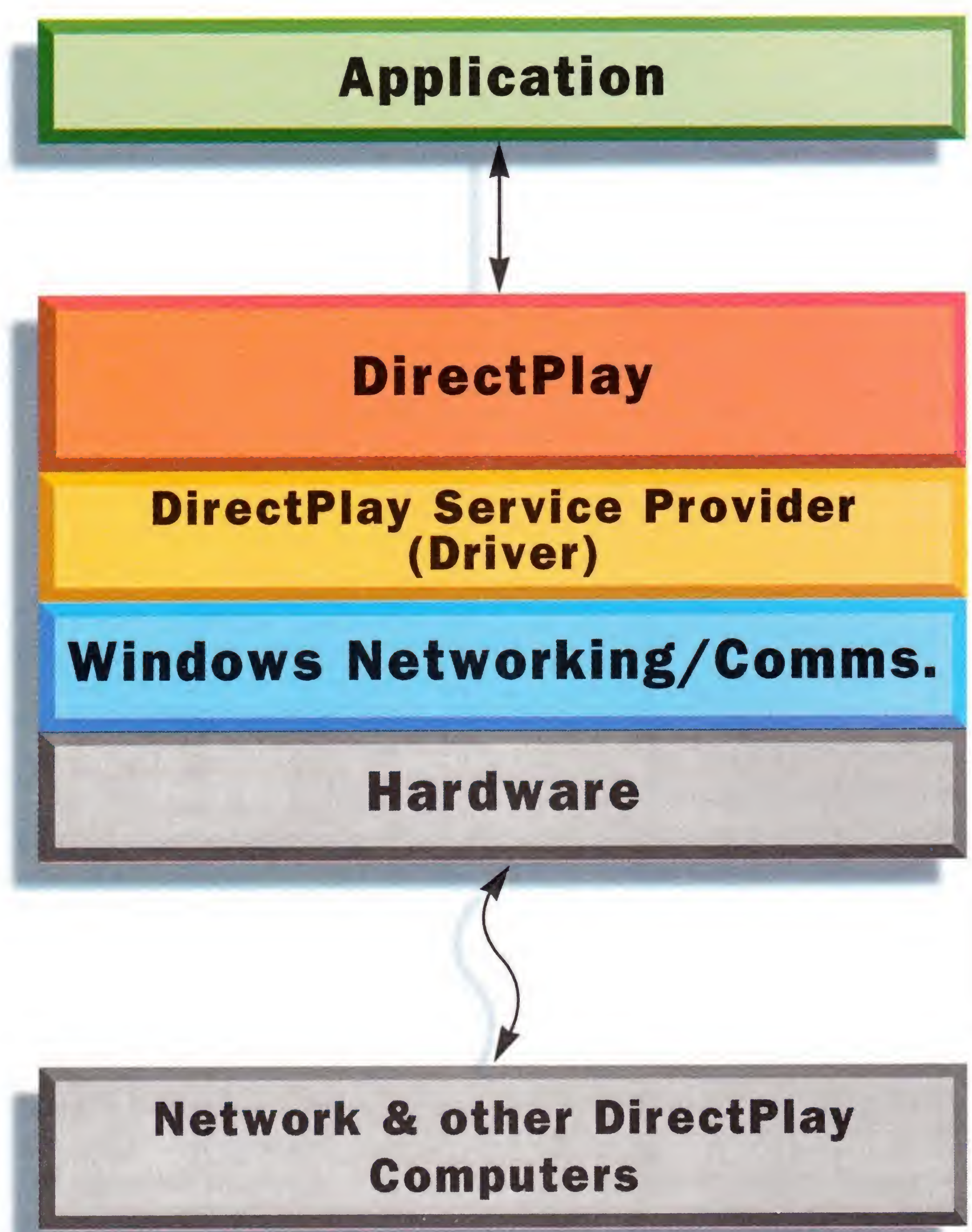
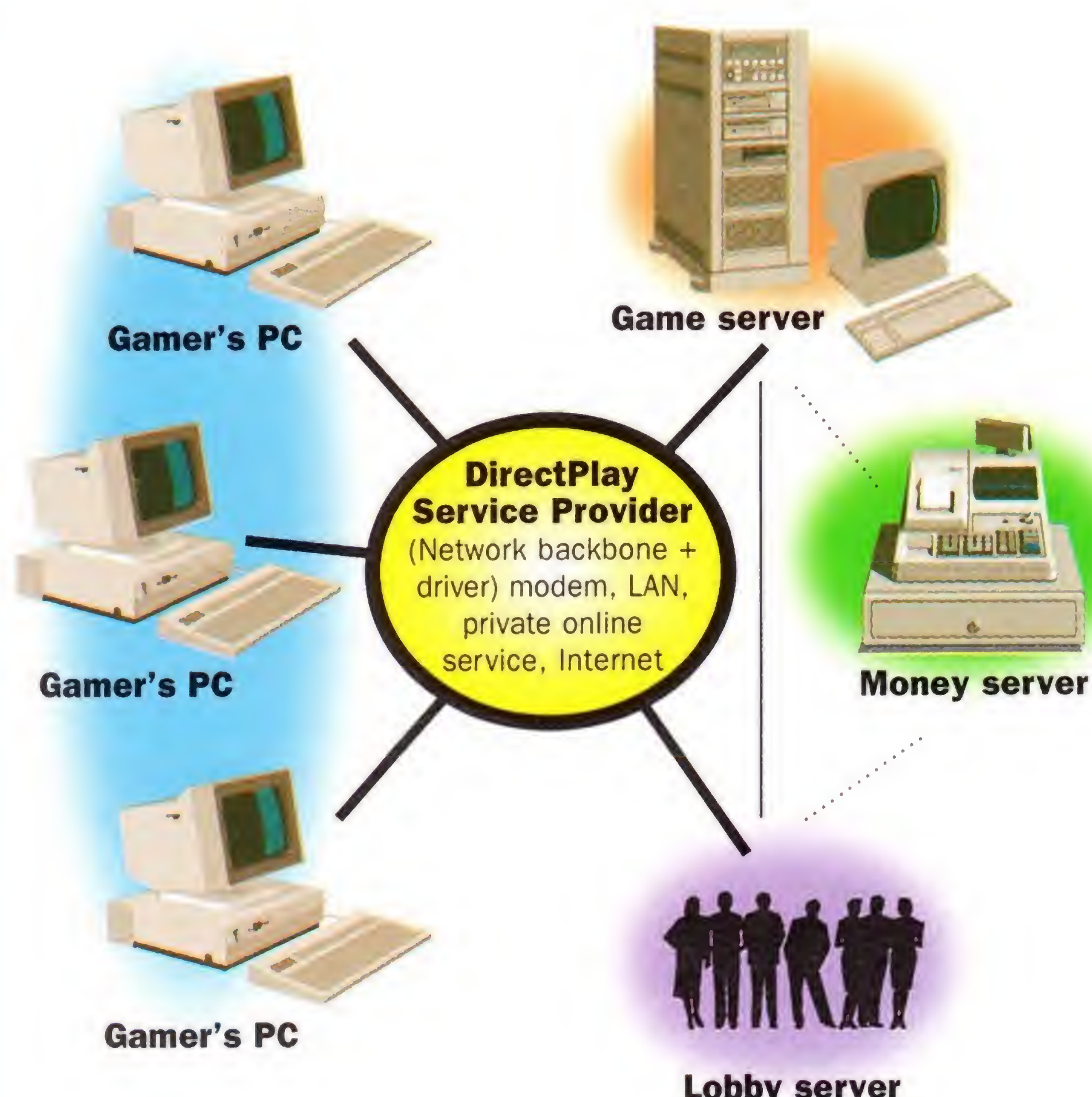
It's clear that with the introduction and continued support of the DirectX APIs (which were developed with strong input from leading PC game companies), Microsoft is making an intense effort to support Windows 95 as a game platform. In the short term, the reason why is equally clear. Despite what people say to themselves to justify the purchase of an expensive home PC, games are the most popular home application, by far. An internal Microsoft estimate is that 40% of the time a home PC is on, it's running a game. To ensure that Windows 95 is accepted as an OS in the home, then, there must be a game presence on it. Especially

DirectPlay 2.0 Components

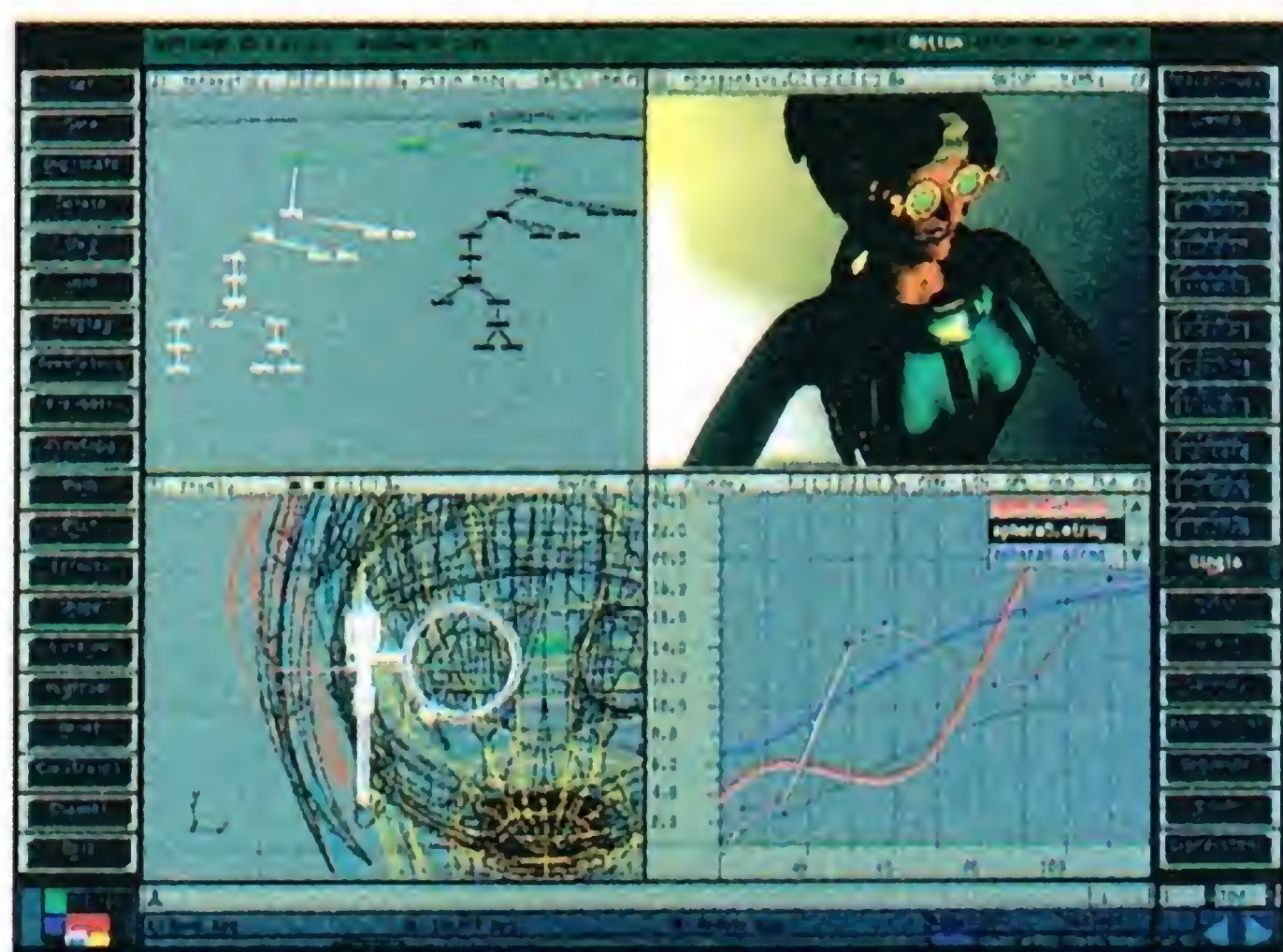


or online play, calls to DirectPlay API on the client PC will go through any drivers for proprietary communications networks, through the Win 95 networking and communications APIs to the hardware, and out over the Net.

Gamers will "meet" in the lobby at their service provider and play games coordinated by the game server, which works with the money server (whichever the service happens to use, DirectPlay 2.0 is designed to support anything which calls the Client Billing API).



ng special



Ever wonder how "they" make all those rendered intro movies? Chances are they started in a window like this on *Softimage*

considering that first-time buyers of home PCs are far less likely to withstand the rigors of installing a DOS game.

Microsoft's DirectX initiative provides technologies that Microsoft will be able to leverage in many other areas (and one of the first will be ActiveMovie, a new digital video standard that provides for MPEG quality video and internet hooks, among other things). But the real future for DirectX and the Game SDK will be revealed with the release of DirectX III in August and DirectX IV in November. That's when DirectPlay 2.0 ships.

DirectPlay 1.0 provides APIs that enable easy LAN and modem play. DirectPlay 2.0 goes one further, enabling play over the Internet and online services. Of course, despite Microsoft's best efforts, the Internet is one of the few areas where it's not the market leader. Yet.

For developers, things will be much the same. They write to the multiplayer DirectPlay 2.0 spec, much as they do now to the version 1.0 API. In DirectPlay 2.0, however, there are drivers for TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol) connections over the Internet, and any that third parties (such as private game networks like DWANGO and the ImagiNation Network or online services like America OnLine) may provide later. Now, multiplayer games are as easy to play online as they are over the office LAN. On the other side of the network line are servers, also provided by Microsoft. Due for release in August '96 is the DirectPlay Lobby Client software, with the release of the DirectPlay Lobby Server and DirectPlay Game Server (which will coordinate gameplay — and billing — functions) due in November. A working beta version of the Lobby server will be released in August as well (see page 51).

There's nothing better than playing against another human, and technology is finally approaching the point where multiplayer online games are a real possibility. Microsoft's strategy, providing an easy solution for both the front and back ends of future online games will be nothing short of brilliant — if it can pull it off.

Why? It's pretty much a settled issue that for the foreseeable future most of us will be using a Microsoft operating system (Windows 95 or DOS) when we sit down in front of our PC, especially when playing games. However, many analysts predict that within a few years a sub-\$500 Net-cruiser box will be a reality. Although Microsoft's own Simply Interactive PC (SiPC) initiative is aiming to cater for this emerging market, it is by no means assured victory. Why? Because the application software for these

Despite Microsoft's best efforts, the Net is one of the few areas where it's not the market leader. Yet

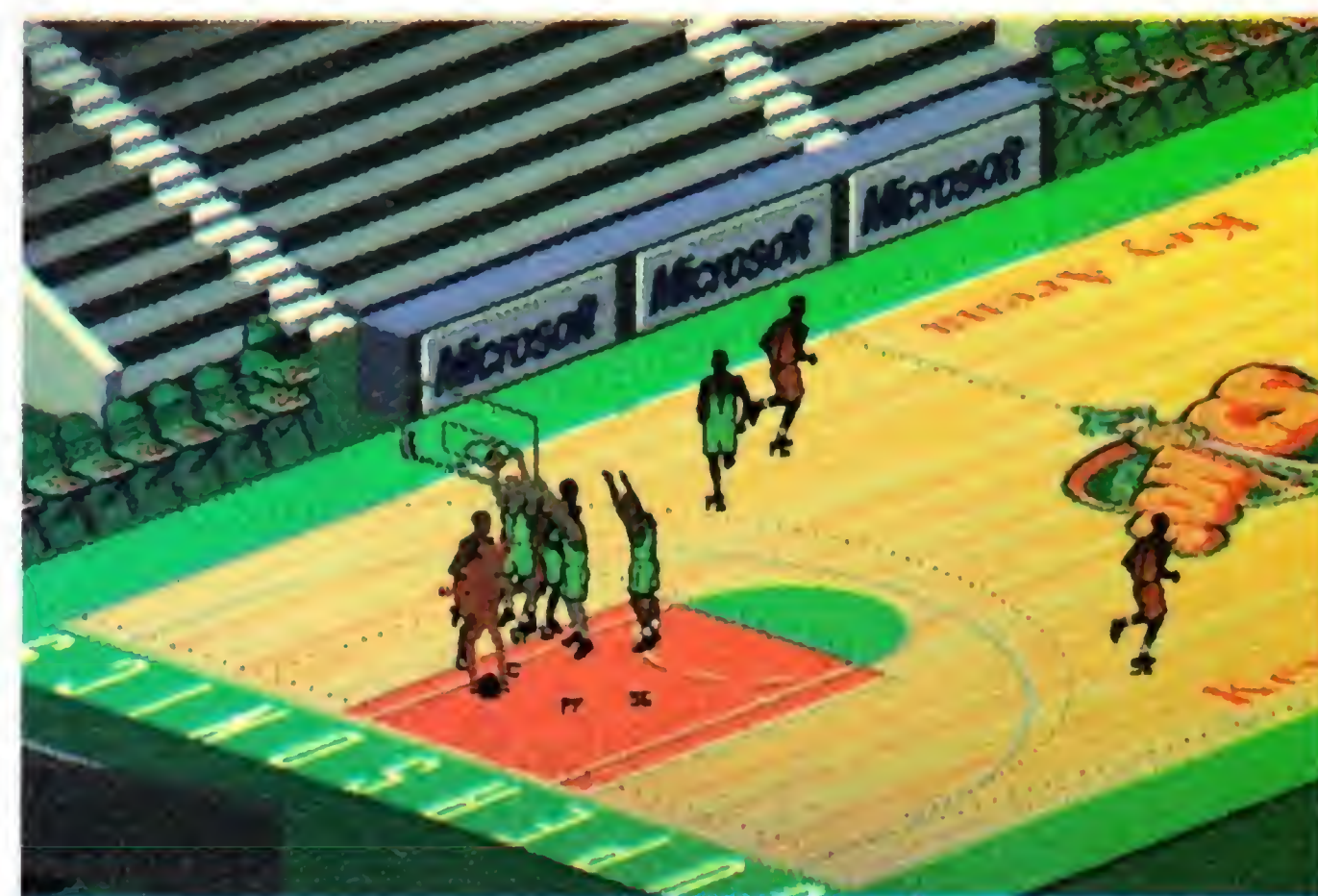
boxes may reside remotely (over the Internet), and the technology for Internet apps may be provided by a company like Sun or Oracle (both of whom are keen to promote their own non-Microsoft operating systems). Microsoft does, however, have an ace up its sleeve — and that is Direct Play 2.0. By convincing PC game developers to tool up and support Microsoft software today, it ensures that they will favor using it tomorrow (and no one wants to ever re-tool from scratch).

In the short run, what Microsoft stands to gain from promoting Windows 95 as a game platform is an increased share in the entertainment market, the consolidation of home users around the operating system, and the development of technology that can be leveraged into other areas of the corporation. But these reasons are nothing compared to what the company stands to lose if the set-top box becomes reality and it isn't running Microsoft software.

How does Windows 95 stack up against the competitors that will be here in 1996 and 1997? The console versus PC war has raged on among gamers

for years, and with a few exceptions, Windows 95 doesn't change many of the arguments. One can't play computer games on a big screen TV, lying on the couch with a beer in your hand. On the other hand, barring XBand, you can't play online games on a console. Another leg up that Microsoft and the PC has on the consoles is that the PC is an open system. Anyone can develop for it, royalty free, and gaining full access to the Game SDK costs a mere \$500 per year, far less than the going rate for a PlayStation or Saturn development kit, around \$20,000. (Of course, they will have to fight the likes of Microsoft for shelf space when it's time to sell the game, but at least it can be developed.) So while the most innovative designers in the world — Suzuki, Miyamoto, and other top talents — are Japanese, and develop for consoles first, the next "garage triumph," like *Doom*, will certainly appear first on the PC.

Do Sega, Sony, and Nintendo view Microsoft as a threat? Maybe they should. Between 1994 and 1997, inclusive, Robertson, Stephens & Co. estimate that the hardware unit sales of consoles will decline by 6.5%, while home PC sales will rise 107.1%. Sources at Microsoft contend that there is "no way" 32-bit sales will ever equal 16-bit sales (which topped out at about 20 million each for Sega and Nintendo). Both Sega and Sony have begun publishing titles for the PC, and while the average PC configuration is still too underpowered to play titles like *WarHawk*



An early shot from Microsoft's forthcoming basketball title, *NBA Full Court Press*; crowds are not in place and gameplay still needs work

or *Virtua Fighter Remix* as well as a console that costs 1/10th as much, this fact is likely to change as 3D accelerators come down in price. Perhaps Howard Lincoln, NOA's president, put it best when he said "Do I think they [Microsoft] want to eat our lunch? Sure. Do I regard them as competitors? You bet."

Microsoft Alphas



Close Combat

A new realtime World War II strategy simulator from Atomic, *Close Combat* could be the most impressive PC game Microsoft will release in the next year



Atomic, which is best known for the *V For Victory* series, looks to have truly outdone itself with this latest strategy game. You're in command

tired, demoralized troops around must truly mimic what actual battlefield commanders felt, which makes *Close Combat* look to be one of the most immersive strategy war games ever.



of either the US 29th or German 352 Infantry as the US attempts to fight from Normandy to Saint-Lô, France, just after D-Day, in this narrowly focused simulation.

You command soldiers down to the squad level, but what is most impressive about the game is the extremely sophisticated AI, developed with the help of a combat psychologist.

Depending of their fatigue level, the pressure of enemy fire, and their raw ability, troops may respond slowly, or not at all, to your orders. Send a tired squad to take a difficult objective and it will likely try it, but it may retreat as soon as things become too difficult.

The feeling you get as you send



You want to feel true desperation? Try getting a squad to cross the bridge into heavy fire with no tank support

Format: **Windows 95**

Publisher: **Microsoft**

Developer: **Atomic Games**

Release Date: **summer**

Origin: **U.S.**



Deadly Tide

Even though it may not appeal to hard-core gamers, this rail shooter looks to stand above the pack

Format: **Windows 95**

Publisher: **Microsoft**

Developer: **Rainbow America**

Release Date: **fall**

Origin: **U.S.**



You don't want to say "if you've played one, you've played them all," but the fact remains that the rail shooter is a well-defined genre. Still, Rainbow

America (the developer of *The Hive*) has taken some steps with *Deadly Tide* to ensure that it stands out from the *Rebel Assault*-clone pack.

First, the game features gorgeous 3D graphics, designed by Amblin Imaging

Designers (who also do the graphics for *SeaQuest DSV* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*). Also, Redbook audio combined with a realistic 3D sound engine make the audio experience compelling as well. On the gameplay side, you can actually move your craft through a full 360° of freedom, a greater level of control than provided by most rail shooters.

In short, this is definitely a title aimed at the "casual gamer," and it should be one that will satisfy them.



Track shooters may not be to everyone's taste, but at least this one is beautiful to look at



Microsoft Alphas

Hellbender

The sequel to *Fury3* is packed with hot new features. But will the gameplay equal the best the PC has to offer?



ellbender, the follow up to *Fury3*, should follow *Fury's* dependable

gameplay — fly above the clouds, and shoot things; swoop below the clouds, pick things off the ground, and shoot things; fly in caverns under the planet's surface, and shoot things. Animated cut scenes between the levels will advance the plot — you're in a civil war in space.

Where *Hellbender* should raise eyebrows, though, is in its complete support for Direct3D.

The game will feature Z-buffering, tri-linear mip-mapping, depth cuing (fog and haze shading), realistic light-sourcing, and will run



accelerated 3D beautifully with 3D cards.

Though it's not certain, it hopefully will run decently without accelerators.

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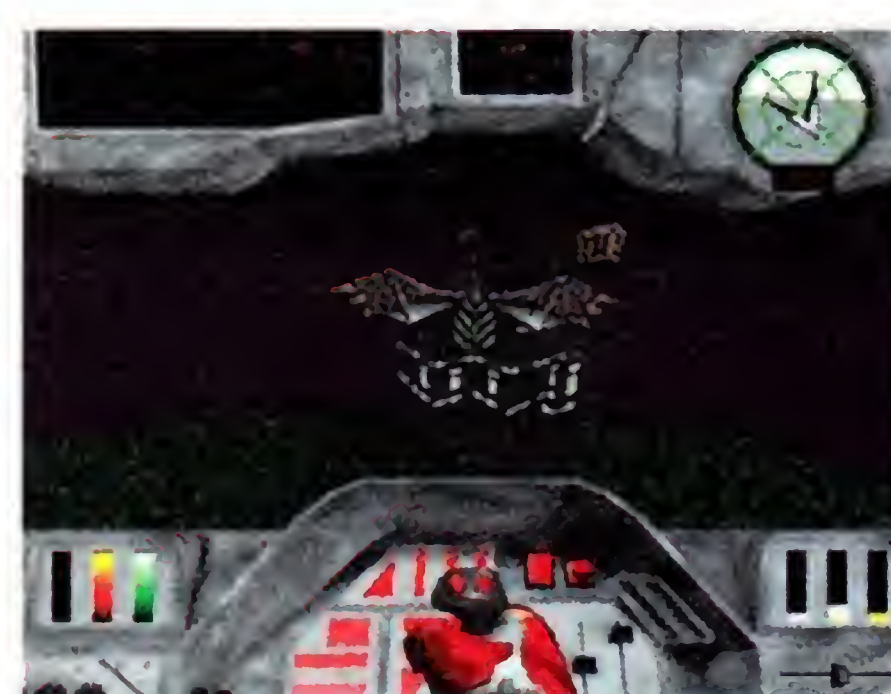
Format: **Windows 95**

Publisher: **Microsoft**

Developer: **Terminal Reality**

Release Date: **fall**

Origin: **U.S.**



Of all the forthcoming Microsoft titles, none should demonstrate the PC's newfound 3D power like *Hellbender*

Monster Truck Madness

An entry into the wacky racing genre keeps the product line diverse



his is not your typical 3D polygonal racing game. You just can't run over and crush cars in *Ridge Racer*. But in *Monster Truck Madness*, you have

entered the strange obstacle-laden universe of really big trucks. Somewhat like *Sega Rally*, this title features extremely accurate physics, circuit and drag racing modes, four-wheel steering, six degrees of freedom, and some of the goofiest looking vehicles known to man. (F.Y.I.: Did you know that monster trucks float, thanks to their fat tires?)

With eight-player network support, digitized sound (from Big Foot, no less), fully rendered trucks, tracks and obstacles, — not to mention the ability to custom-configure your truck for different terrain types — *Monster Truck Madness* is a cool game. Not to mention the fact that it will be the first title to support the Jolt force feedback stick.

That makes it *really* cool.

ng



Format: **Windows 95**

Publisher: **Microsoft**

Developer: **Terminal Reality**

Release Date: **fall**

Origin: **U.S.**

Eye-popping graphics, killer sounds, and realistic physics should enable *Monster Truck Madness* to compete with *Destruction Derby 2* and other forthcoming PC racing games

You're an intelligent,
You're a crazy, disturbed individual
well-adjusted,
who would rather play
interesting, fun-loving
childish games against real people
game-playing adult
than use your time productively.
who loves making
You're sick. You know it.
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talking

[continued from page 10] up its game publishing division, from releasing just four titles in 1995 to a scheduled 10 in 1996.

Is this merely a few divisions of a large company unilaterally moving to the gaming sector, or is this part of a larger company objective?

Bill: Well, hopefully it's a larger company objective [laughs]. We certainly set out as such. You know, the use of the PC in the home environment is increasing and gaming is a big part of that. People love to play games, and most of the things you do to make games better are things that apply to other software as well. I mean, enabling the audio to work well and the graphics to be fast. Games are a great way to measure progress there because game writers are just super-demanding, and they've basically ignored Windows. Up until Windows 95, the way you wrote a game was you wrote around the operating system. Even Microsoft's own *Flight Simulator* was a DOS product, and it's only now that we're building the Windows version of that.

And it was all just about speed. That whole notion of "Do our graphics layers give flexibility, or do they just slow things down?" Well, there's no harder-core audience than the gaming community to go out and ask, "What does it take?"

It always causes problems if you go around the operating system. I mean, like installing DOS games a couple of years ago, where you had a different audio card, or you sometimes used Windows, but you'd like to run games that didn't work under Windows. It was a nightmare.

And we're just working our way out of that. With the broad popularity of Windows 95 and the support from the gaming guys and the hardware guys, you know, we're finally to the point where a person can say, "Yeah, you don't have to know somebody who's an expert to do these things."

NG: And Windows 95 has really been the focal point for all this effort, with providing an easy-to-use "plug-and-play" environment?

Bill: Games don't use the file system very much. So basically, until Windows 95, games were written to the hardware. Now, with the variety of audio cards and graphics cards that are out there, it was becoming as much of a nightmare for the developers — testing and installing — as printer drivers were for productivity applications before, say, a decade ago when we finally started to get those into the operating systems. Nobody today thinks, "Oh, I'll write a unique print driver." That's Microsoft's problem to work with the printer guys to get all of those drivers done.

And so we said, "Hey, we're going to make Windows 95 attractive for game developers, so they'll stop writing DOS applications." I'm sure some people here were skeptical about ever getting those guys to stop going around it. Well, part of our breakthrough was that it turns out that — because the blitters all worked a little bit differently — PC hardware actually has some



Pictured here is the first Microsoft team before it moved from Albuquerque, NM, to Redmond, WA. Pictured bottom left is Bill Gates; at bottom right is cofounder Paul Allen

acceleration capabilities that the DOS people weren't using. But by abstracting those blitters out, we actually gave people a layer where they often would run faster than they had with DOS. And this started to open peoples' minds.

NG: Would you include Microsoft in the same category as Sony and Matsushita, as giant outside players, increasingly influencing the game industry?

Bill: In terms of who's changing the platform? Who's coming up with new initiatives? It's fair to think about Microsoft. But in the game business, the neat thing to do is to spot the hot new games. And although there's a good chance those will be coming out of the companies you mentioned, there's certainly an equally good chance they'll be coming out of somewhere unknown.

When 3% is too much...

NG: Let's talk about Direct3D, Microsoft's effort to make all PC graphics accelerators compatible with all software (when running Windows 95, naturally). Direct3D, in theory, provides the illusion of a standardized 3D graphics acceleration specification. Because of the slight overhead of the Direct3D APIs and drivers [having to "go through" Windows 95 slows the program down a little], when one writes directly to the hardware and bypasses Windows 95, there will always be a marginal speed boost.

Since marginal increases are often what separates a killer app (*Doom*, *Sonic*) from the "also rans," isn't there a danger that game developers will still bypass Direct3D, and hence Microsoft's software, in pursuit of a competitive advantage?

Bill: No. Three percent performance gains do not make the difference between a killer application and...

NG: You're sure that Windows 95 will only suck a 3% performance loss?

"This is a gold rush period for anything related to the Internet. And games — I don't think — will be any exception"

The title "BUST A-MOVE 2" is displayed in a large, stylized, blocky font with a yellow-to-red gradient and a thick black outline. Below it, "ARCADE EDITION" is written in a smaller, similar font. The background is a dark blue space scene with a planet and stars.

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Bill: Our job is to make sure that 3% is all it is.

The thing that you're spending time on is drawing the polygons or filling in the textures, and for this the API is thin to the accelerated hardware, and you're not going through it again and again. If we find a case where somebody wants to go to the hardware [thus bypassing Windows 95], if they're *really* going for that extra 3%, we'll tell them they're crazy because it'll make their job a nightmare. They'll never be able to keep up with it. But if [the advantage of bypassing Windows 95] is more than 3%, then we need to make sure our API gets richer.

So no, I don't see a problem with that. I mean, people always told me that Windows would never succeed because character mode was faster, and characters would always scroll faster, and people could just go to the frame buffer faster than they could write through Windows. Well, today, you don't — except in the game world, and that's now changing. The speed differences in absolutes got small enough that the benefits were very, very strong.

And there are benefits to being able to receive a fax in the background, or being able to just hit a button and go over and look at something else. I mean, our vision of your computer is that you basically never turn it off. And if you want to look up a movie review on the Internet, or if you want to see about spending money, or see if messages have come in, it's got to be there all the time. This boot-time thing is just ridiculous. (You know, videogame machines don't have much in the way of boot time).

Online gaming

NG: Online gaming is currently the industry's holy grail. When do you think that true multiplayer, online gaming will be a reality?

Bill: The lack of success of, say, the ImagiNation Network, has always been interesting. I mean, I don't use ImagiNation Network a ton, but I do use it a little because I have some people I play bridge with over the system. I think that — if it wouldn't crash [laughs] — it's pretty nice. But I think the pricing model there has held things back, and so it just didn't get to critical mass as a place people come to. With the Internet, on which you are going to be buying the connectivity for partly nongaming reasons — and there's no doubt the competition to provide that connectivity is going to be immense — it means that multiplayer gaming really can thrive.

Now, the latency that you have on the generic Internet is a problem for a lot of games, and you'll see a lot of hacks to deal with this. You know, interpolation hacks, things where you only play with people that you happen to be getting good latency with, or things where you actually disconnect from Internet and make a local call in to a server that you're all connected to, or people



Off the record, many powerful figures within the game industry have expressed a fear of Microsoft, while pointing to its "bullyboy" reputation and Gates' ruthless business tactics

who do private networks. Latency tricks will be pretty worthwhile for certain kinds of games — not for bridge [smiles], but for multiplayer action games it becomes a very big deal.

I know that there's ourselves (and probably a couple of dozen start-ups) who believe that the Internet will be the place where multiplayer gaming takes off. And so the level of investment is phenomenal — I mean, almost outrageous. And this is a gold rush period for anything related to the Internet, and games — I don't think — will be any exception.

NG: At the dawn of TV, much was made of its potential to educate and to culturally enlighten the public. In 1996, however, sporting events and lowest common denominator sit-coms make up the bulk of TV's output.

Given this, do you think that some interactive entertainment form — a descendent of today's gaming industry — will be the eventual killer app on whatever turns out to be the information superhighway?

Bill: Well, killer-app is generally a term that implies there's only one thing that drives everything. In terms of this, no, there won't be any one killer-app.

Wanting your kids to do well is as close to a killer-app as any of this stuff, and that's why PCs are popular in homes with kids. That's where you get the super-high penetration. In the USA we've got 75% PC penetration into homes with a high demographic income and kids.

NG: So what is Microsoft doing to make online gaming a reality?

Bill: What we're doing with these direct multiplayer game APIs [as part of Windows 95] is

"Boxing games are better on the consoles. But if you get really broad and include Myst-like games, I mean, give me a break!"



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talking

abstracting the need for the game companies to bet on what type of connectivity comes along. If they just use the DirectPlay API, then [their games] work on local area networks, they work on the Internet, they work on a local server, dial up — and the user just gets to pick how he or she wants to go out and meet people.

DirectPlay will help on multiplayer games because, in the past, somebody doing multiplayer games had to think through for themselves “OK, what do we want to do about meeting lobbies? What do we want to do about protocols?” and all those things. Now they don’t have to worry about these things. And so, two years out, the percentage of PC games that will have a multiplayer aspect will be 70% or 80%.

Bill Gates: the gamer?

NG: Bill, do you play games yourself?

Bill: Well, I’m a reasonably avid poker, bridge, chess, go, and checkers player.

I played the videogames of the time, when I had more time: *Frogger*, *Pac-Man*, *Defender*. And back at Harvard I played with the PDP 1 that had the original *Space War!* game, with vector drawing. The original cool PDP 1 application, in my dorm at Harvard when I wanted to waste time, was *Breakout*. That was the cool game.

NG: At the time of Microsoft’s creation, did you ever think about making games?

Bill: When we first started Microsoft we thought, “Well, should we do games?” And I went and met Nolan Bushnell [the creator of *Pong*] and hung around Atari, and talked to them. We always thought, maybe we’d get around to doing games in those early days because the kind of hacks that you had to do to make the games work were kind of appealing. But, that never became a focus.

NG: Is there anyone who you particularly admire or respect — or even fear, professionally — in the gaming world today?

Bill: Well, in the world of games there has tended to be people who come and do a few good things, and then, somebody else comes along. As I’ve said, Bruce Artwick has been able to renew the *Flight Simulator* franchise reasonably well over a period of time, but *Flight Simulator* is the only game where you could say it was selling well six years ago and it sells well today.

In terms of game authors, it seems like they either make so much money and then go take it easy [laughs], or somebody else comes along. There’s just an immense amount of talent out there — and remember the tools are just getting better. And that tends to tilt things more to the creative side than the bit-twiddling side. Although, I still think that for good action games, you’d better have some bit-twiddlers deeply involved or else it won’t be that great.

Why? Because people always want you to push the state of the art. *Doom* became a strong

brand partly because it was the first to do that technology, and that’s only just starting to fade.

NG: Does Microsoft fear any game companies? You say that CD-i initially posed some threats. Then there’s that famous quote from Apple’s Michael Spindler. In 1991 he was asked which company Apple feared most going into the 1990s, and he answered “Nintendo.”

Bill: [laughs] They should have feared Apple more!

NG: Indeed. But do you not think that with an 8-bit game machine in over one-third of all US homes, Nintendo could have leveraged its success into other areas of the computer business?

Bill: Oh, it’s unbelievable. I mean, we’re in this funny little suburb called Redmond in Washington and, when we first moved here I said to people, “Hey, we’re the second largest software company in Redmond.” At least during the fourth quarter, good old Nintendo would outsell us. Now, that was when they ruled the roost, and the fad was in full swing. And now, it’s not quite as monolithic.

But, when you talk about business, “fear” is maybe not the perfect word to use. You have to have a real sense of what good work other companies are doing. You have to acknowledge their work and figure out, well, can you partner with them? Or do you internally or, through other partnerships, find those same things?

On the PC platform, we can recruit a lot of game developers. Nintendo isn’t locking people up so they can’t write PC games. Historically, Nintendo was able to do that versus other game platforms, but never the PC because it wasn’t on its radar screen.

So I don’t think fear is the right word.

We’ve always had this question of the boundary line between game machines and PCs.



Last year’s Windows 95 campaign was the biggest software launch in history

“There’s this notion that you can sort of rip off the Japanese... That was the 3DO model”



This interview was conducted on the Microsoft campus, in an experimental, prototype “wired” house of the future. PCs in each room communicate with the house’s occupants, as well as each other. The lights, heating, and appliances are all voice-activated



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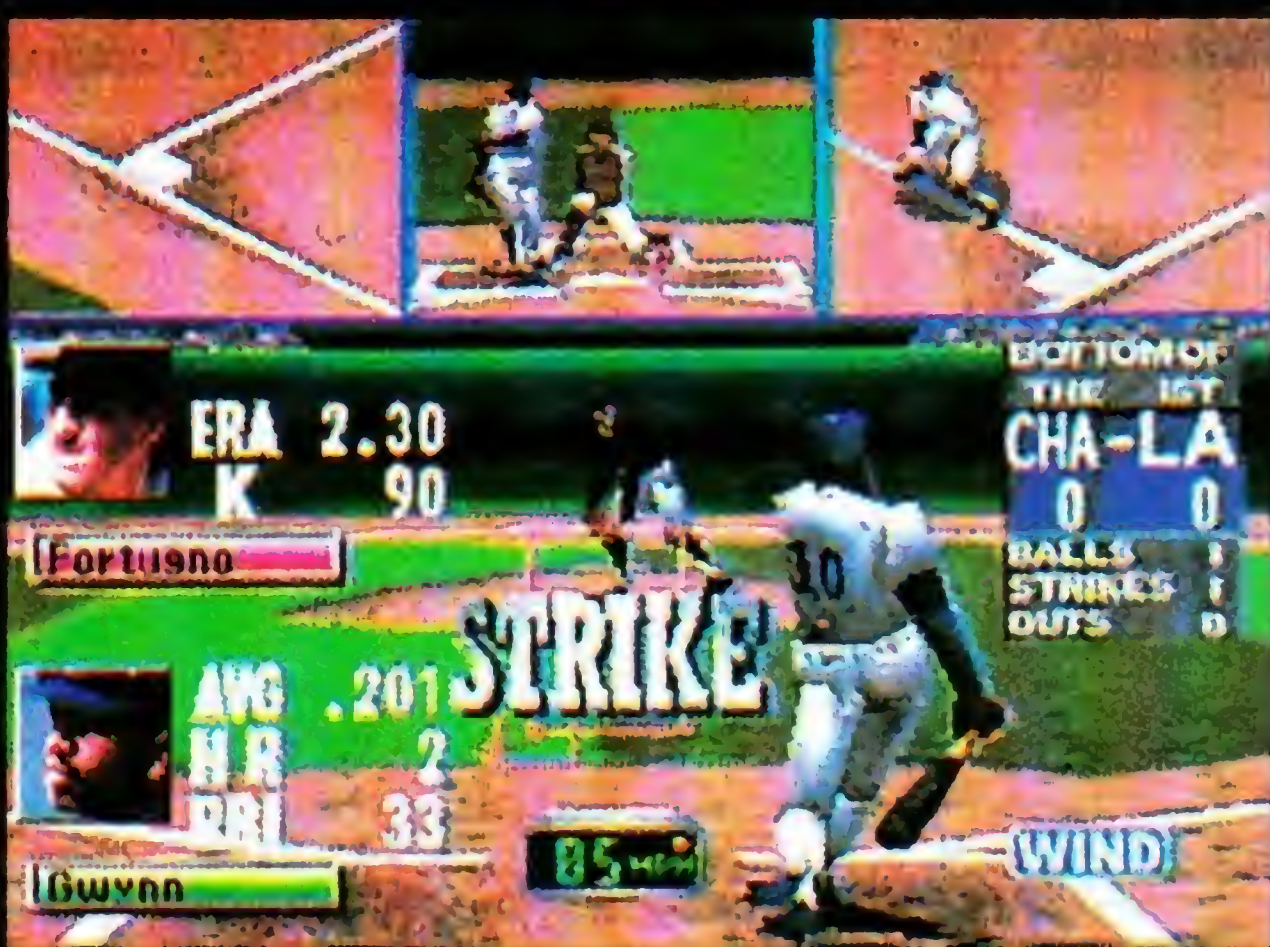
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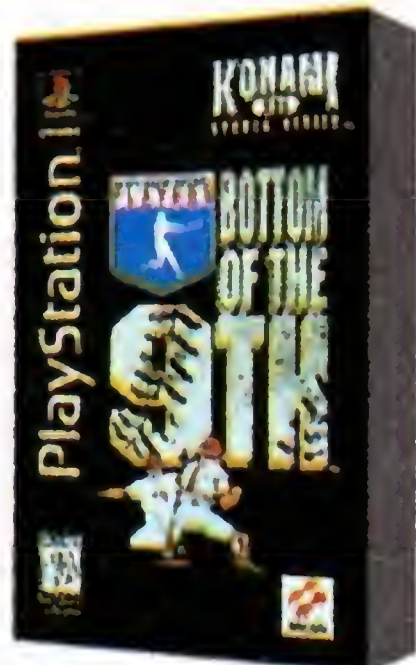


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talking

When Trip Hawkins was first starting 3DO and talking about his visions — which were very good, I mean, he's a very smart guy — I wondered "Wow, jeez, maybe he's going to draw the line between the PC and the videogame a little bit differently than I'd like to see it." [Laughs] But now he's not — at least as far as I know — a force in this arena.

NG: So what happened to Trip Hawkins' vision? Why didn't the original 3DO machine work out?

Bill: Well, there's this notion that you can sort of rip off Japanese companies and — no really, I mean, that's sort of the 3DO model.

It's kind of rude [laughs] to have a business model where you let a Japanese company do the commodity part, which you're licensing to them nonexclusively, so they don't get any of the upside of the software royalties, but they get just the console part, which is the money-losing part, and you keep the game royalties.

It's hard to say why the pieces didn't come together [for 3DO]. If the price had been different at one point, if they'd gotten a few more software developers... But the business model always had a bit of a problem in that 3DO didn't have enough money to make the platform successful and yet the piece Matsushita was given — even if things went well — well, they were just going to be a commodity supplier of that piece.

NG: So can any game machine thrive in the price bracket between \$400 and, let's say, \$1,200?

History would say no.

Bill: I think it's pretty tough. It's pretty tough to squeeze something in the middle there. [When considering game machines] people are going to say, "OK, a few hundred bucks to keep my kid happy... I guess." Although they probably don't realize how many cartridges they're going to have to buy as part of that [laughs].

I mean, the big fundamental is, if you use the TV as the display, and you have no local storage, you can get the price way down. But then, as soon as you start to have local storage and decent display, you might as well go all the way and have a PC. So I think if somebody made a game machine that was super, super, super good for like \$300 or \$400, you might be able to get it. But you would certainly have to have games that were way better than the games on the \$200 console before you could wake up in the morning and face yourself trying to sell a \$300 or \$400 game console.

NG: What does Matsushita have to look forward to as it plans to enter the arena with M2?

Bill: [Laughs] I think it's tough for somebody to come in with a new platform at this point. I just think it's very hard to establish a new platform.

Everybody, in my opinion, is very impressed with how well Sony has done. I mean, if you'd handicapped Sega, Nintendo, and Sony a couple of years ago, most people would have put Sony as

sort of the third most likely. Fourth, really, 3DO had a lot of mindshare. And the fact that Sony's done as well as it has is a credit to it.

Then again, if you look at it financially, nobody's making money like Nintendo made in the good old days.

Gunning for adults

NG: A lot of people are saying that if the game industry is to move forward, it has to start producing games which resonate with adults. A lot of people are looking to the continued increase in graphic resolution and sophistication as the key to doing this, as adults will play once the games look less cartoon-like and more like real life.

Do you buy this reasoning?

Bill: I don't think so. I mean, if you get better graphics then maybe you can do different types of games, which may draw in those people. But it's not like you take boxing and make it high-resolution and then all of a sudden 50-year-old men say, "Wow, hey, I'm not going to the football game tonight, I am going to play that new boxing game." [laughs]

Until you really get the Internet where there are other people and an element of socialization, I think it's pretty hard to pull the adults in. I think that with the Internet, and the kind of socialization that's possible, the boundary between what's a game and what's not a game has always been a little bit unclear. And I think it's set to become even more unclear in the future.

I mean, if you're walking around in a fantasy space and you can do things that aren't normal things, is that a game? Or is that just an Internet superchat kind of thing? Well, the taxonomy is going to get so rich, that it won't be a black and white dividing line in this new world. Particularly with the PC, where you're going to get so much power and a high percentage of them with an Internet connection as part of that.

As we fudge that spectrum, then we'll start to pull in a much broader demographic. I mean, that certainly is our goal.



Players on the ImagiNation Network may have encountered Bill Gates — or at least, the graphic representation of him — in the Bridge forums. Now that would be a win to remember...

"We always thought that maybe we'd get around to doing games because the kind of hacks that you had to do to make the games work were appealing"

ng

U L T I M A T E

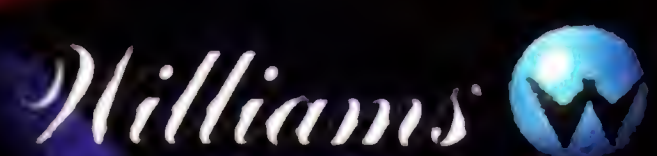
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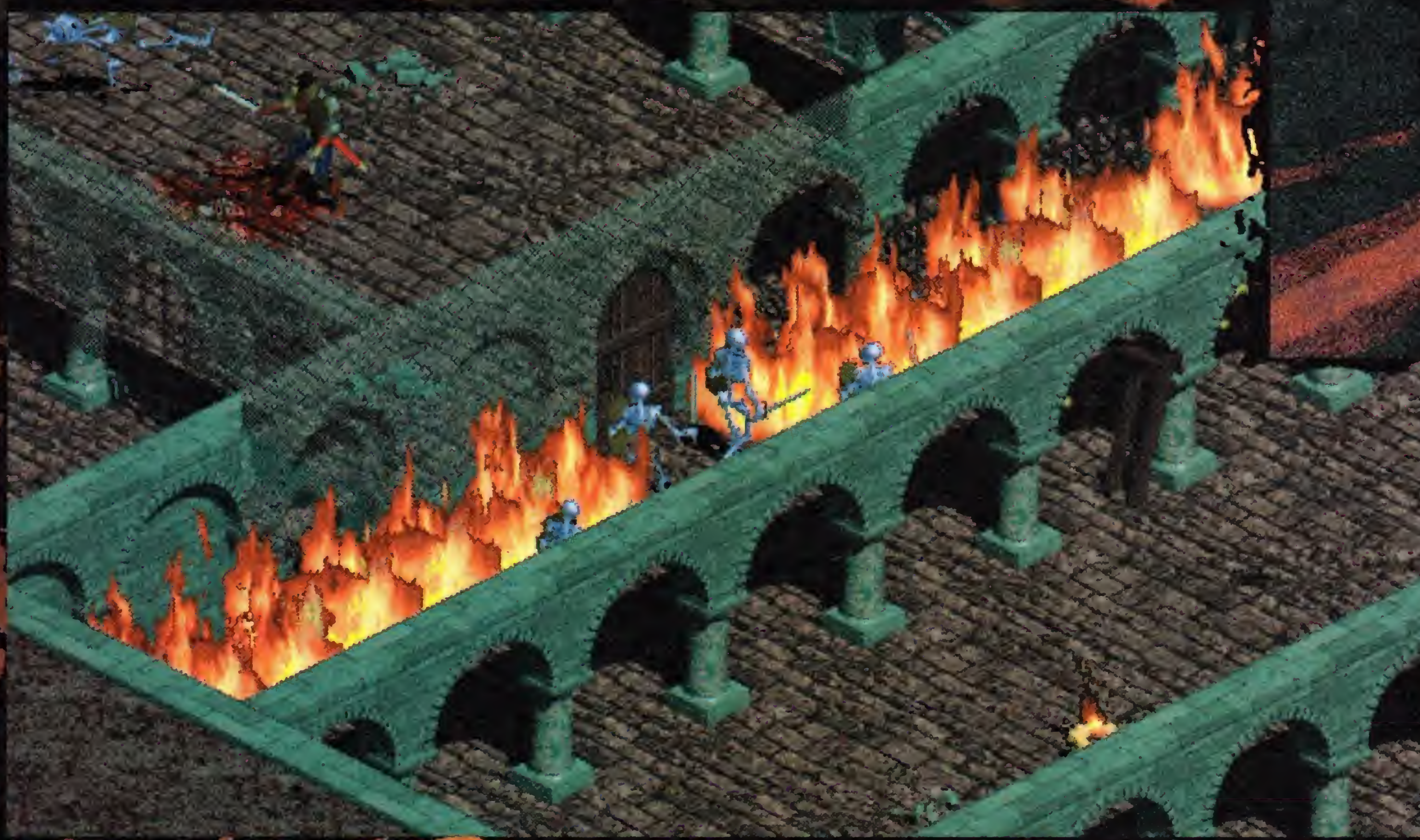


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Fred Ford and Paul Reiche III,
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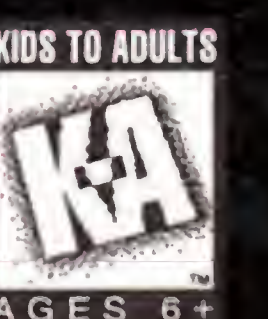


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Game previews like nothing else on Earth

While it's surprisingly quiet on the home console front, that doesn't mean the game world is silent. Thrill to our exclusive, no-one-else-has-'em previews of *GURPS*, *Leisure Suit Larry 7*, *Dark Earth*, *X-COM III*, *Heroes of Might and Magic 2*, plus in-depth coverage of Sega's latest miracle, *Virtua Fighter 3*.

68 Virtua Fighter 3 **ARCADE**

The latest *Virtua Fighter* from Sega's AM2 breaks boundaries and gets shockingly real



74 GURPS **PC**

After a long wait, Steve Jackson's catch-all role-playing system is headed to the PC

80 Wrinkle River Story **SATURN**

Sega of Japan will soon unleash the cutest game to hit home consoles in years



82 Dark Earth **PC**

A sprawling game about a dark, ugly world is delivered with style by Worldscape



86 Lords of the Realm II **PC**

Manage a medieval fief? Sounds cool, and the sequel adds catapults and modem play



89 Leisure Suit Larry 7 **PC**

PC gaming's most notorious lounge lizard is back with more babes and bad puns



92 X-COM III **PC**

The highly anticipated sequel to the one of the finest squad combat games ever made



95 Prop Cycle **ARCADE**

Namco brings the exercise bike into the 21st century — this is an arcade game?



96 Might and Magic II **PC**

Heroes of Might and Magic set the strategy game standard — can the series keep up?



97 Blast Chamber **SATURN, PS-X**

A nonsport, four-player game with bombs? It's not what you're thinking...



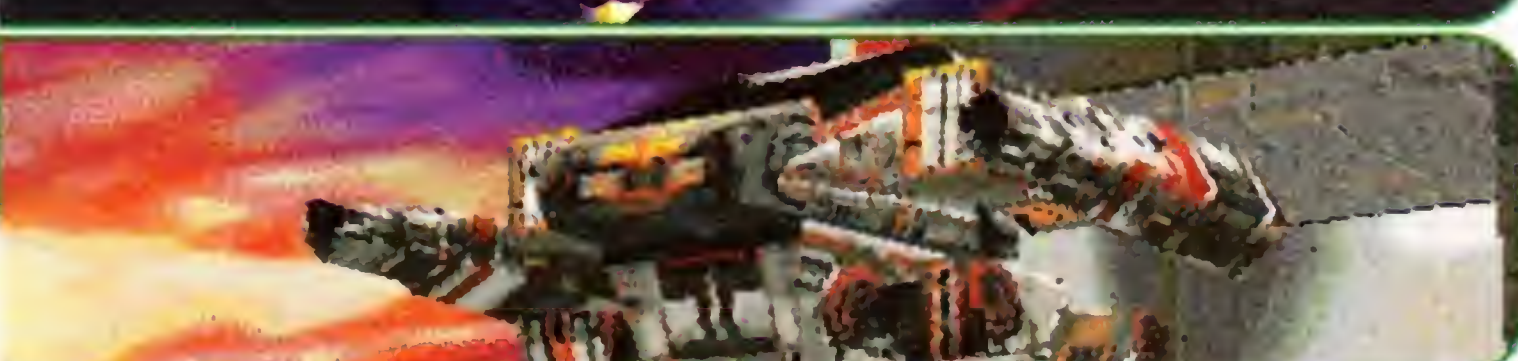
100 Rayman 2 **SATURN, PS-X**

One of the best looking side-scrollers in years makes a return trip — good, or evil?



105 G-Nome **PC**

This game had a long, hard road to see release, and could be worth the wait



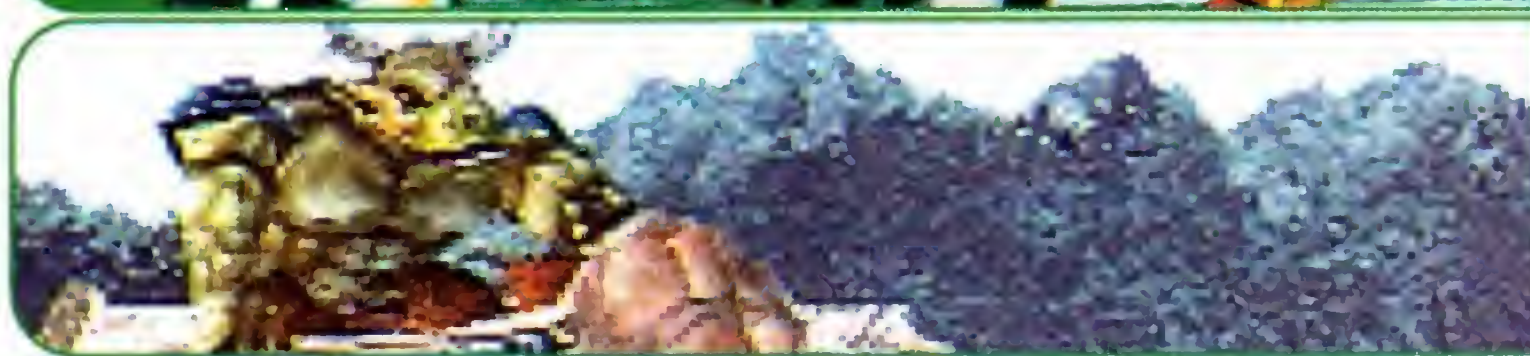
109 Last Bronx **ARCADE**

AM3, Sega's other arcade division, shows off its own 3D brawler



110 Killing Zone **PS-X**

Yet another 3D fighting game, but with a twist that warrants more than a look



ng alphas



Dural's makeover and new powers are perhaps the most obvious example of the power of Sega's Model 3 board. Note these shots were generated in realtime, not prerendered

Virtua Fighter 3

Characters breathe, flex their muscles, react violently to being jumped on, and even follow the opponent's movement with their eyes

Format:	Arcade
Publisher:	Sega
Developer:	Sega AM2
Release Date:	Sept. (Japan)
Origin:	Japan

Without AM2, it's entirely possible that the 3D game experience would consist entirely of flight sims and *Doom*-style first-person shooters. When Yu Suzuki unveiled *Virtua Fighter* in 1993, it was as if someone had suddenly turned on the lights — cars, planes, and the odd tank had been seen before rendered in realtime, but to see human figures moving realistically in a 3D

Yu Suzuki's AM2 team invented 3D fighting games. Now, armed with Sega's Model 3 board, it is ready to raise the stakes higher than ever before

environment was a revelation, and the possibilities this implied set the gaming world on its ear. The arcade experience would never be the same again.

Now in its third incarnation, the *Virtua Fighter* series continues to lead where others are content (or even struggle) to follow. AM2's Model 3 arcade board can push 1 million fully texture-mapped polygons per second, more than three times as many as *Virtua Fighter 2*'s Model 2 board. At the heart of the system is a graphics



Aoi, an expert in akido, is one of VF3's two new characters. No word yet on whether she's related to any of the others, a strange tendency all the women in the VF series seem to share



Model 3 Specs

CPU: • PowerPC 603e
Resolution: • 496x384 or 640x480
Graphics: • Geometry engine averaging 1 million polygons/sec
Renderer: • 60 million pixels/sec
 • 24-bit textures
 • Micro-textures
 • Z-buffering
 • Trilinear Interpolation
Shading: • High-specular Gouraud shading, fix shading and flat shading,
 • Texture and edge multilayered anti-aliasing
Lighting: • Parallel lights
 • 4 spotlights
 • Pin spotlights
Special effects: • Fog
 • Zoning
 • 32 levels of translucency
Sound: • SCSP x 2 (same chip as used in Saturn)
 • 16-bit CPU – 68EC000
 • Sampling @ 44.1 KHz
 • 64 voices (2 stereo pairs)
 • MIDI interface

chip that accomplishes in hardware what VF2's Model 2 could only do through software, including multiple light-sourcing and Z-buffering (see sidebar). So confident is Sega of Model 3's power it's now content to lease the Model 2 board to such also-rans like Tecmo and Jaleco.

This high-speed graphic complexity enables VF3 to present an unprecedented level of detail, and it seems clear that bringing those details to life makes up the bulk of the improvement from VF2 to VF3, both in the fighters themselves and the overall environments where combat takes place. Dural's new look is the most immediately noticeable example of Model 3's power. Her entire surface is smooth and highly reflective, and the oft-made comparison to the liquid metal T1000 of *Terminator 2* is a fair one. This is especially true since Dural now morphs from a mere puddle into a fully sculptured female figure, and the technical skill and hardware power involved in making this happen in realtime is nothing short of astounding.

However, the human characters are perhaps more impressive still. The faces alone are each composed of roughly 1,000 polygons, so expect to see their expressions change with the fortunes of battle. As seen at the recent AOU (Arcade Operators' Union) and ACME (American Coin Machine Exposition) shows, characters also breathe, flex their muscles, react violently to being jumped on, and even follow the opponent's movement with their eyes. Also, clothing

now flows independently of the body — an obvious extension of Lion's bouncing vest straps in VF2, taken to the next level. This depth of realism has to be seen to be fully appreciated, and is extremely close to the high-quality images in Sega's *Virtua Fighter* CG Portrait series for Saturn, except of course, now they all move in realtime.

Other character upgrades include new, additional sets of costumes, and (details again) the strong possibility that each character will speak using his or her native language or accent. Last, following the pattern set from VF1 to VF2, all the old characters have been retained and two new ones added. The first is a new female fighter called Aoi, an akido expert dressed in a long, flowing kimono. Early demos show her looking extremely calm and relaxed, all the while throwing opponents around like toy dolls.

Of the second new character little is known, except that in marked contrast

Aoi is an akido expert dressed in a long, flowing Kimono. "Butcher" is an oversized, obese wrestler

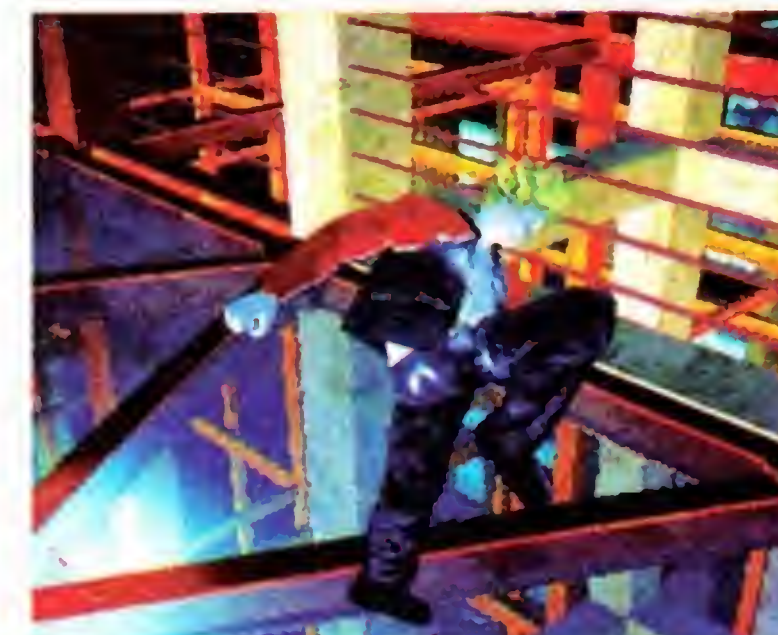
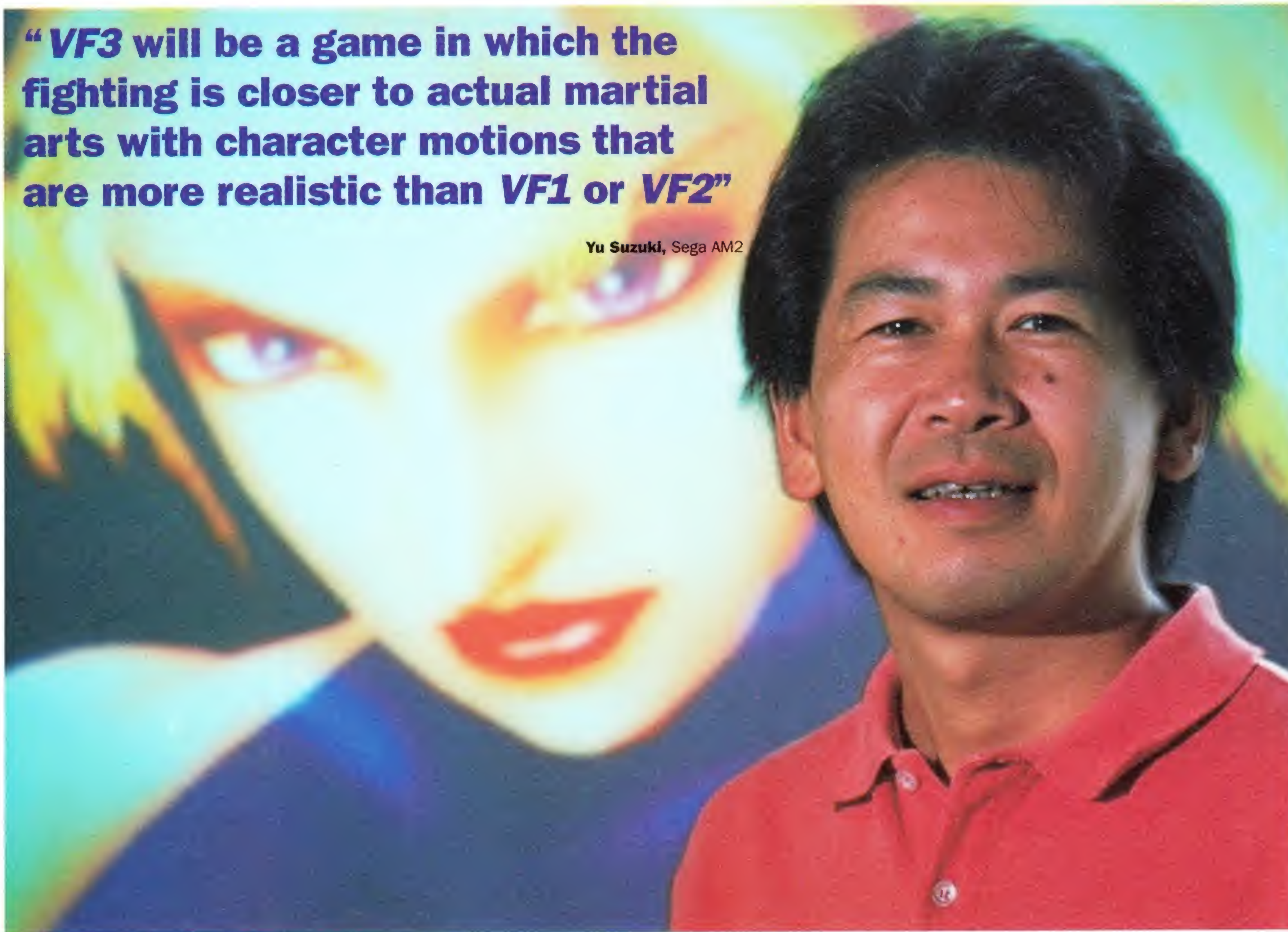
to the slim, almost fragile-looking Aoi, he's an oversize, obese wrestler, capable of taking enormous punishment. In fact, most of his fighting style seems to be based on allowing opponents to hit him,



ng alphas

"VF3 will be a game in which the fighting is closer to actual martial arts with character motions that are more realistic than VF1 or VF2"

Yu Suzuki, Sega AM2



Note the multiple light sources and transparent surfaces of Jacky's stage. Model 3 can handle up to four spotlights and up to 32 levels of translucency

Sega AM2's Yu Suzuki is interviewed in NG 11. The next most anticipated title from AM2 is *Daytona USA 2*, due later in '96



Jeffry shows off his new, nonsquare arena, and the flexing power of his new polygonal pecs

and then using the rebounds off his enormous rolls of fat as the basis for counter-blows. The majority of the rumors pin his name as "Butcher," although this seems doubtful, as it would represent a marked departure from previous *VF* nomenclature, which tends to favor more plausible character names and designs.

However, while

the new characters and dramatic strides in character graphics are awe-inspiring, it's the complete overhaul given to the game's locations which represents the most significant difference in gameplay from previous installments. The square, single-texture combat arenas we've become accustomed to have been replaced by a much more varied set of surroundings. It seems that AM2's tinkering with the formula when designing *Fighting Vipers* has influenced its approach to *VF3*, and while the classic *VF* "ring out" has not been removed entirely, AM2 has worked to enable more interaction with the characters' environment.

Virtua Fighter 3

Jeffry's stage, for instance, is now a roughly circular, sand-covered island. Lau's stage is bordered on two sides by walls, and Lau has been given new moves to take advantage of them. Jacky's stage takes place on a high-rise construction site, and it's not hard to imagine what might happen if the transparent surface beneath him were to shatter. Once again, the details are everything. Early demos show sand flying off Jacky's boots when fighting on Jeffry's island, and fallen opponents pushing aside the grass in Kage's glade.

Other changes and improvements to gameplay are more subtle, yet more profound. As Yu Suzuki stated in his interview with *Next Generation* (NG 11), "*Virtua Fighter 3* will be a game in which the fighting is closer to actual martial arts, with character motions that are more realistic than *VF1* or *VF2*." To this end, the most notably unrealistic feature of the first two games — those odd, high, floating jumps — have been replaced by more natural kinematics.

From the makers of...

Sega AM2's credits quickly reveals why it's the most influential arcade team in the world:

- 1985: *Hang On*, *Space Harrier*
- 1986: *Enduro Racer*, *Outrun*
- 1987: *After Burner*
- 1988: *Power Drift*
- 1989: *Super Monaco GP*
- 1990: *G-LOC*, *R-360*, *Radmobile*
- 1992: *Virtua Racing*
- 1993: *Virtua Fighter*
- 1994: *Daytona USA*, *Desert Tank*, *Rail Chase*, *Sport Fishing*, *Virtua Cop*, *Virtua Fighter 2*
- 1995: *Cool Riders*, *Fighting Vipers*, *Indy 500*, *Rail Chase 2*, *Sport Fishing 2*, *Virtua Striker*, *Virtua Cop 2*, *Wing War*
- 1996: *Gunblade*, *New York*, *Sky Target*, *The Sonic Fighters*, *Virtua Fighter Kids* (Kizu), *Virtua Fighter 3*



VF3 uses the same highly detailed character data Sega created for the VF CG Portrait series, and it shows. Note Pai's new costume, and also see how her flowing dress moves independently of her body. Additionally, Pai, who is arguably the fastest of the VF cast, will be even quicker still when powered by Model 3 technology



Since these

supernatural leaps were originally created to enable the escape from potential ring outs, other means of getting out of the way have been included instead: each character now has a method of side-stepping the opponent, in a fashion similar to *Battle Arena Toshinden's* sideways rolls, but with a more natural feel. (Other 3D fighters who include similar techniques are Midway's *War Gods* and

Namco's *Soul Edge*.) Other counter-moves have been added, along with better techniques for escaping throws and holds. Overall, the emphasis on creating a system of extremely true-to-life hand-to-hand combat has gone

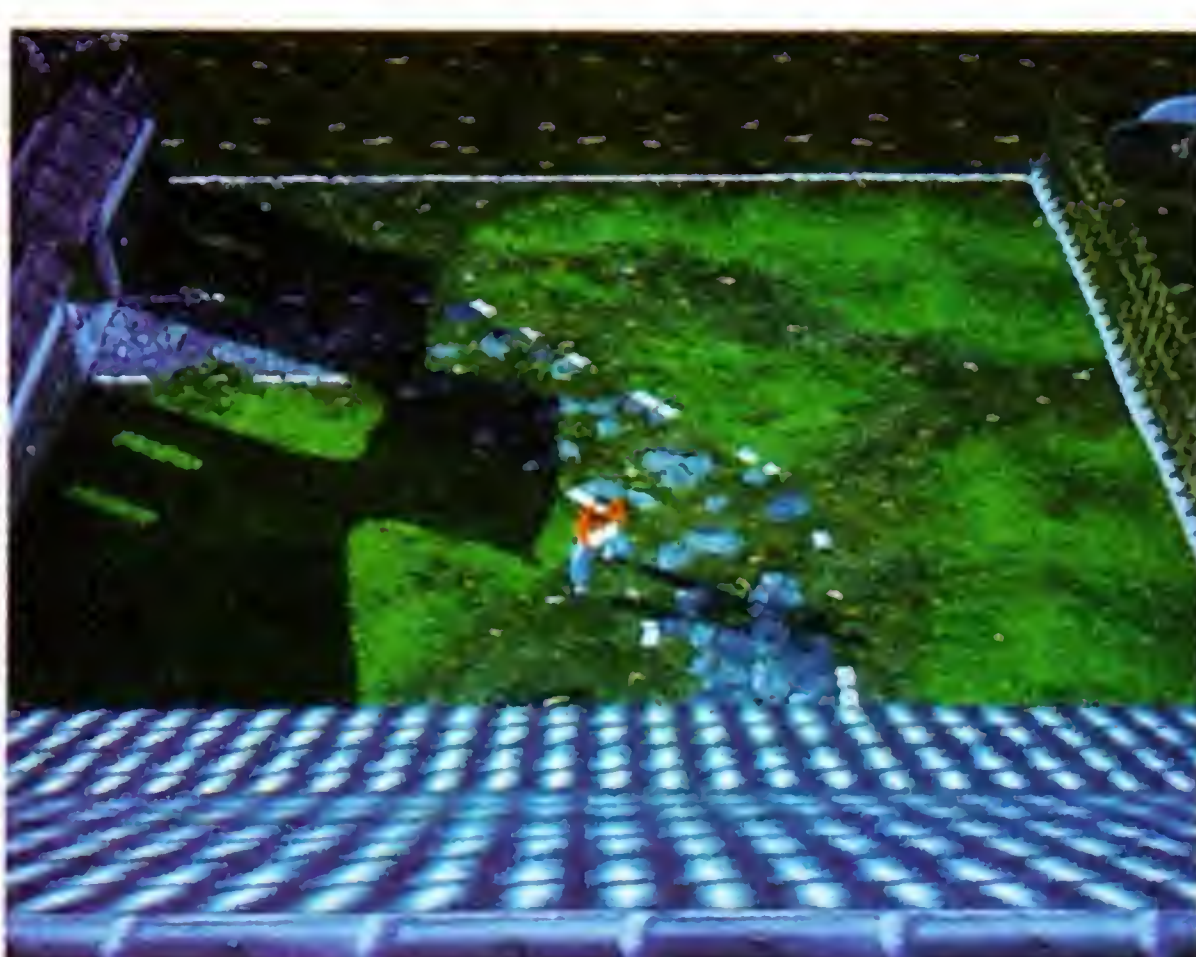
through its third evolutionary refinement, and the results are more solid, intuitive, and in tune with real-world physics.

So overpowering is the Model 3 board that any conversion to Saturn is bound to represent serious technical hurdles. The modest-by-comparison demands of adapting *VF2* required a lot of clever "cheating," and working around Model 3's technical prowess may prove insurmountable for Saturn.

But that's for the future, and for a vastly different segment of the market which AM2, as an arcade division, need not be concerned with — yet. For now, If there was any doubt of Sega's complete dominance in the arcade arena, *VF3* shatters it.

ng

If there was ever doubt of Sega's arcade dominance, *Virtua Fighter 3* shatters it



Lau's stage is impressive, with walls on two sides and an asymmetrically textured floor. Can't say much for those jackass slacks, though



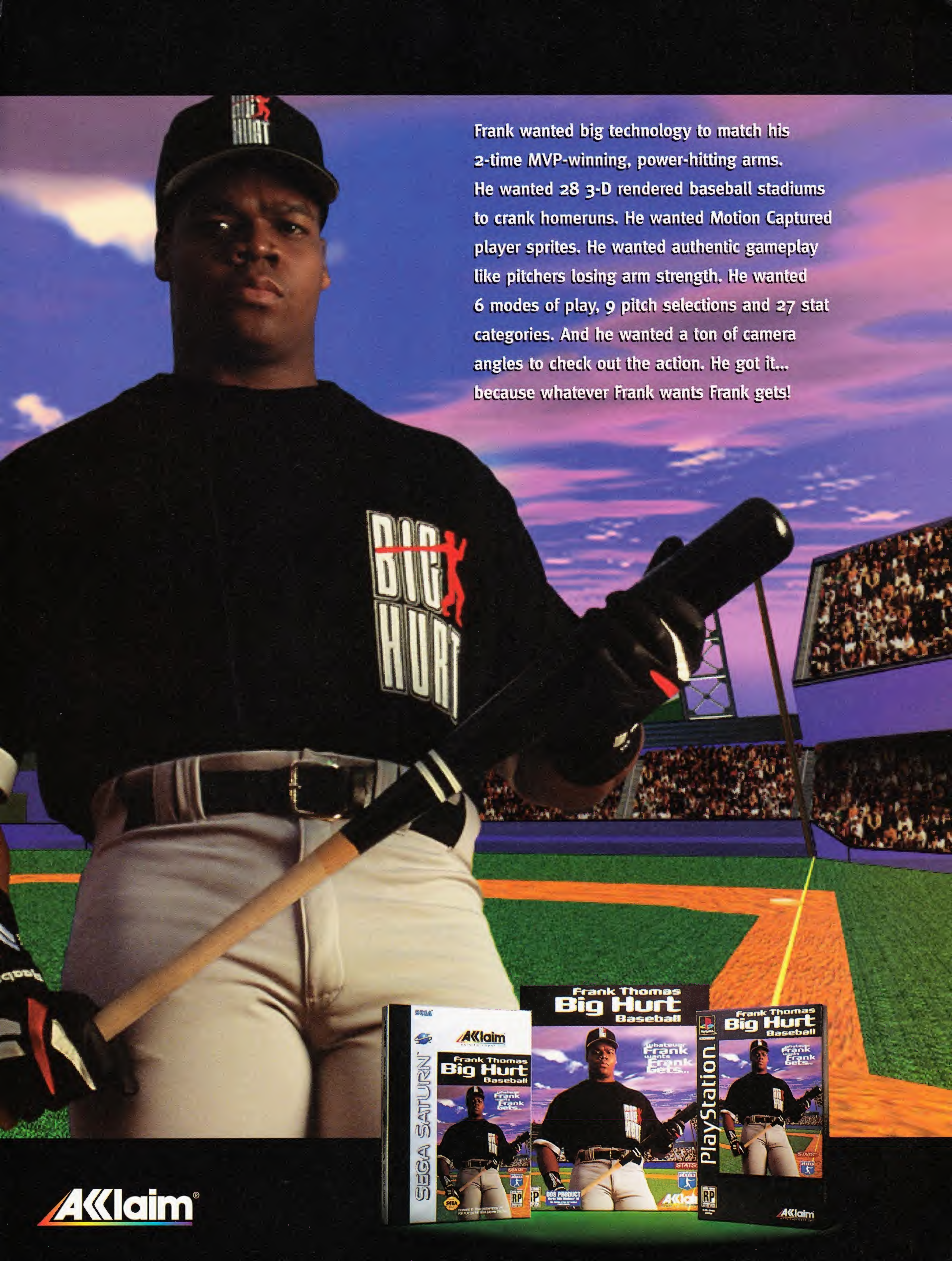
whatever Frank wants, Frank Gets...



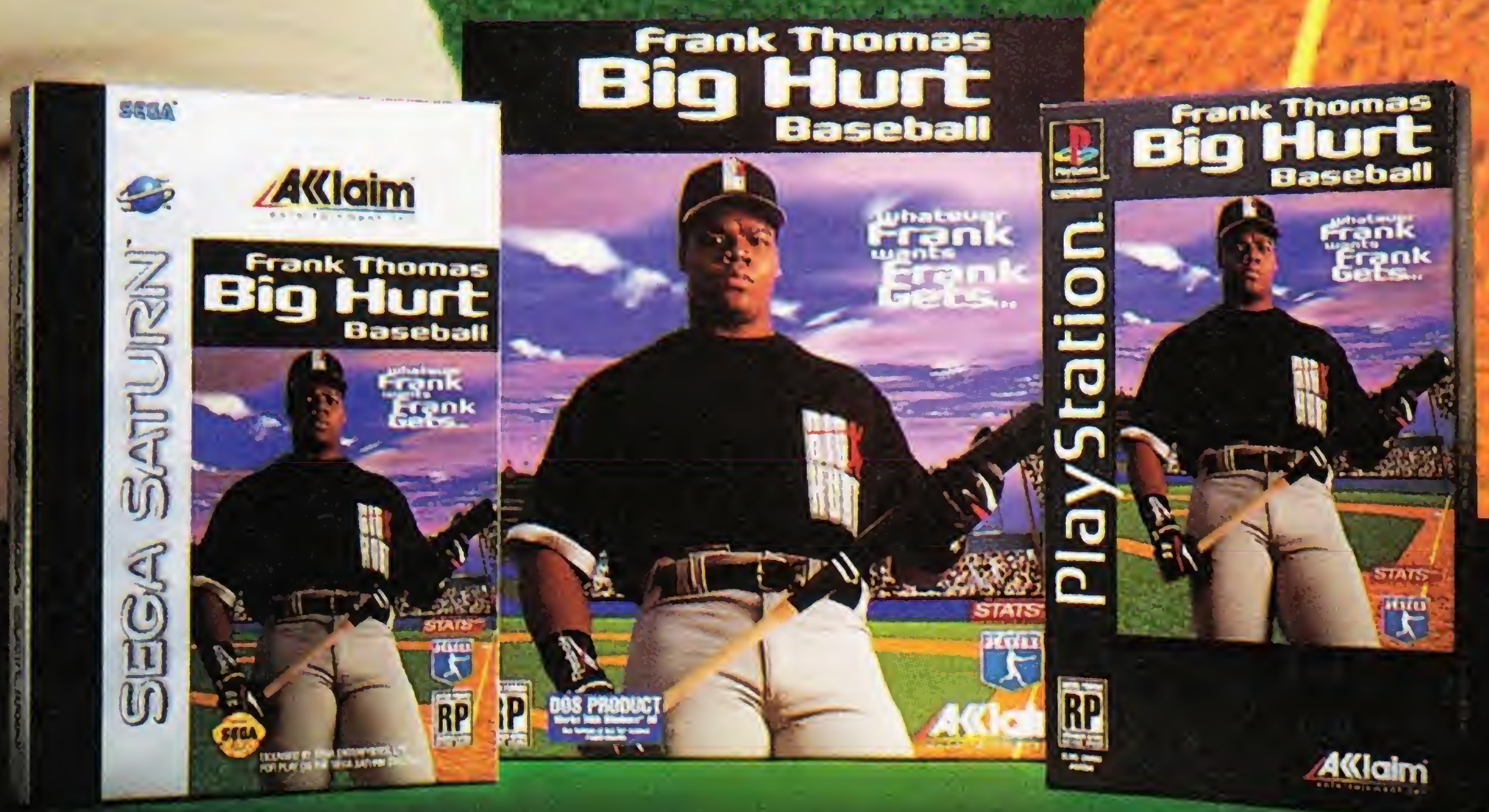
Frank demanded motion-captured fielding and computer-rendered perfection before he would unleash his home run power!



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A large, detailed image of Frank Thomas in a black and white baseball uniform, holding a bat. The uniform has "BIG HURT" written on the front. The background is a stylized baseball field with a purple and blue sky.

Frank wanted big technology to match his 2-time MVP-winning, power-hitting arms. He wanted 28 3-D rendered baseball stadiums to crank homeruns. He wanted Motion Captured player sprites. He wanted authentic gameplay like pitchers losing arm strength. He wanted 6 modes of play, 9 pitch selections and 27 stat categories. And he wanted a ton of camera angles to check out the action. He got it... because whatever Frank wants Frank gets!

The AKKlaim logo, featuring the word "AKKlaim" in a stylized font with a rainbow-colored underline.

ng alphas

G.U.R.P.S.

Format: **PC CD-ROM**Publisher: **Interplay**Developer: **Interplay**Release Date: **winter**Origin: **U.S.**

There's nothing quite so satisfying as toasting one of your opponents with a shot from a flamethrower. Not recommended for close quarters combat

Steve Jackson is no newcomer to either the pen-and-paper roleplaying market or to computer gaming. Back in the early 1980s, two of his most popular board games, *Ogre* and *Car Wars* were converted over to computer formats by the then-king of CRPGs, Richard Garriott, and his teams at Origin.

Shortly after, Jackson released what was to be the ultimate answer to roleplaying. Called *G.U.R.P.S.* (Generic Universal Role-Playing System), the new game was to answer all of the problems of conflicting roleplaying systems by laying down a standard set of rules that would work in any of the system's myriad universes. In this way, players could use the same basic rule book to create a cowboy, an alien, a martial artist, or a standard Tolkienesque adventurer, requiring only a few rules specific to their home realm to round them out. The fledgling system

Computer role-playing games get a shot in the arm from one of the biggest names in pen-and-paper gaming



In a step-by-step combat system similar to *X-COM*, *G.U.R.P.S.* enables players to go to town with the most powerful armaments of the future

quickly gained popularity and soon there were a whole set of worlds for players to explore ranging from ice-locked prehistoric plains to the powerstacks of a cyberpunk future.

Even with the success of the new system and the stabilization of the PC as a CRPG platform, no plans for a computer release were announced. Then, in early '94, Interplay announced that it had acquired the *G.U.R.P.S.* license and was beginning work on a new set of RPGs. Before gamers had a chance to get too excited though, Interplay also managed to grab the rights for TSR's AD&D world out from under SSI,

***G.U.R.P.S.* answers the conflicting problems of roleplaying systems by laying down a standard set of rules**

forcing many to wonder whether Interplay would still continue work on the *G.U.R.P.S.* project. After a long silence, Interplay is now finally ready to show the details of its long development cycle, and while it remains to be seen how well everything will work in the end, the individual pieces have the potential to change the face of computer roleplaying forever.



There's a lot going on in each of the towns, from straightforward violence, to hidden plotlines that will require subtlety and diplomacy to uncover



Nonplayer character faces are surprisingly full of intricate expressions

Since *G.U.R.P.S.* is designed to work with any time zone or fictional setting, the first thing developers had to do was to decide which universe the new game would be set in. In the end, it was a look for something new that led the development team to its decision. Tim Cain, the game's producer, explains: "We've put together a post-nuclear game in the same sort of genre as *Wasteland*, but of course, we're not a sequel to that game. It's set in the very early part of the 22nd century, just after a nuclear holocaust, and your character has been raised in one of the civil defense vaults that the population has been forced to inhabit. The basic storyline is that you have to leave the relative comfort of the vault to find a chip to repair the bunker's water purification unit."

With this opening, players will get a chance to venture into a world that will be completely new to them. As the game continues, characters will discover that there is a great deal more to this quest than first meets the eye. Cain continues, "We plan to have a lot of subquests. They aren't really necessary in the sense that if you don't do them you can't finish the game, but they will be necessary in the sense that in order to finish the game, you're going to have to gain certain skills that can only be improved through use. If you don't do any subquests, you're never going to get any character points, and if you don't get any character points, you're never going to improve," he adds. Obviously, the multiworld flexibility of

the *G.U.R.P.S.* system lends itself to pan-universe adventures, but gamers will have to wait a little bit longer for that sort of play. "We actually worked with the game designer who [wrote] the 'G.U.R.P.S. Time Travel' manual and worked out a complete time-travel adventure, but it was just too much artwork for us to get done in a

"We've put together a post-nuclear game in the same sort of genre as *Wasteland*, in the early 22nd century"

Tim Cain, producer

reasonable amount of time," Cain maintains. Fortunately, the future still holds the possibility of a multiworld adventure, as the team can make use of existing art along with new creations and pour it all into the system's basic combat and character creation system.

One of the strongest aspects of *G.U.R.P.S.*, both the original and computer versions, is its detailed character creation system that enables



Unlike most roleplaying games, *G.U.R.P.S.* uses a hex-based, rather than grid-based, movement and combat system. While it's a little difficult to get used to, the system enhances multiple target effects in combat

both advantages and disadvantages in players' alter egos. Players' characters can be much more personalized than in other systems, creating gameplay that is much more individualized and therefore interesting. Cain explains, "We've got a huge number of skills, just counting combat alone there are dozens. Each of the different types of rifles, plasma weapons, beam weapons, and even flamethrowers require particular gun skills. There are other combat skills like

ng alphas



Before scanning, the clay heads are grid marked to determine the major areas of motion

fast-draw and dodging that enhance players' fighting ability. Outside of combat, we've got different reaction-based skills, like diplomacy, fast-talk, sex appeal, and acting." These are things that enable the player to interact with the people onscreen and get better reactions than you would normally. In the end, Cain and team had to cut a few of the disadvantages and skills because they didn't fit the game.

"I actually made a rule with the designers that if there was an advantage or disadvantage or skill that had absolutely no bearing on the game, then I didn't want it in there. The characteristic Eunuch got thrown out because there is no actual sex in the game. Colorblindness stayed in because we will force

players with this disadvantage to play in a gray scale mode," he adds.

No matter what mode players end up in, the designers at Interplay have gone out of their way to ensure that the graphics measured up to the rest of the game. Besides beautiful combat scenes (reminiscent of *X-COM* in both look and play), and fully animated icons, the game features a sort of "talking-head" conversation system that is like nothing ever attempted before. After the team worked out exactly what it was after, a sculptor made a clay head that fit the bill. From there, the artists took the completed head and carefully studied it to see what parts of the face needed to

be animated most in order to create a realistic final image. Using a Faro Space Arm and the *VertiSketch* software, the team digitized the head, and then used the *LightWave* modeling software to do necessary geometric corrections. Next, texture maps were created in *Photoshop* and laid onto the modeled head. Finally, the art team began working on the animation.

Geoff Gregor, one of the artists on the *G.U.R.P.S.* project explains the technique: "Usually you start with conceptual art, and you try to figure out what the character is going to look like, predetermined by the writers. A lot of times we'll either use photos or look at our own faces moving. You'll find that you'll make faces in the mirror a lot to see which way your face is moving when you make different expressions," Gregor explains. Once animation is completed, it's made



With the "talking-head" conversation system, you can communicate with facial expressions alone

Besides beautiful combat scenes and animated icons, the game features a "talking-head" conversation system

to match as closely as possible to the text spoken by that character. The end result is a conversation system enabling players to make judgments about their current standing with the creature they are interacting with — based solely on that character's facial expressions.

G.U.R.P.S. has everything necessary to be the best roleplaying game of all time if the team can manage to pull the pieces together (and if the program can run on machines consumers are likely to own). Though it's still too early to tell, the team at Interplay is very confident, and judging from early runs, it has every reason to be.

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The finished gallery of archetypical faces can be used for a slew of different characters



Each of the faces in *G.U.R.P.S.* starts as a series of digitized points, moving to a set of polygons, and finally mapped with finished textures

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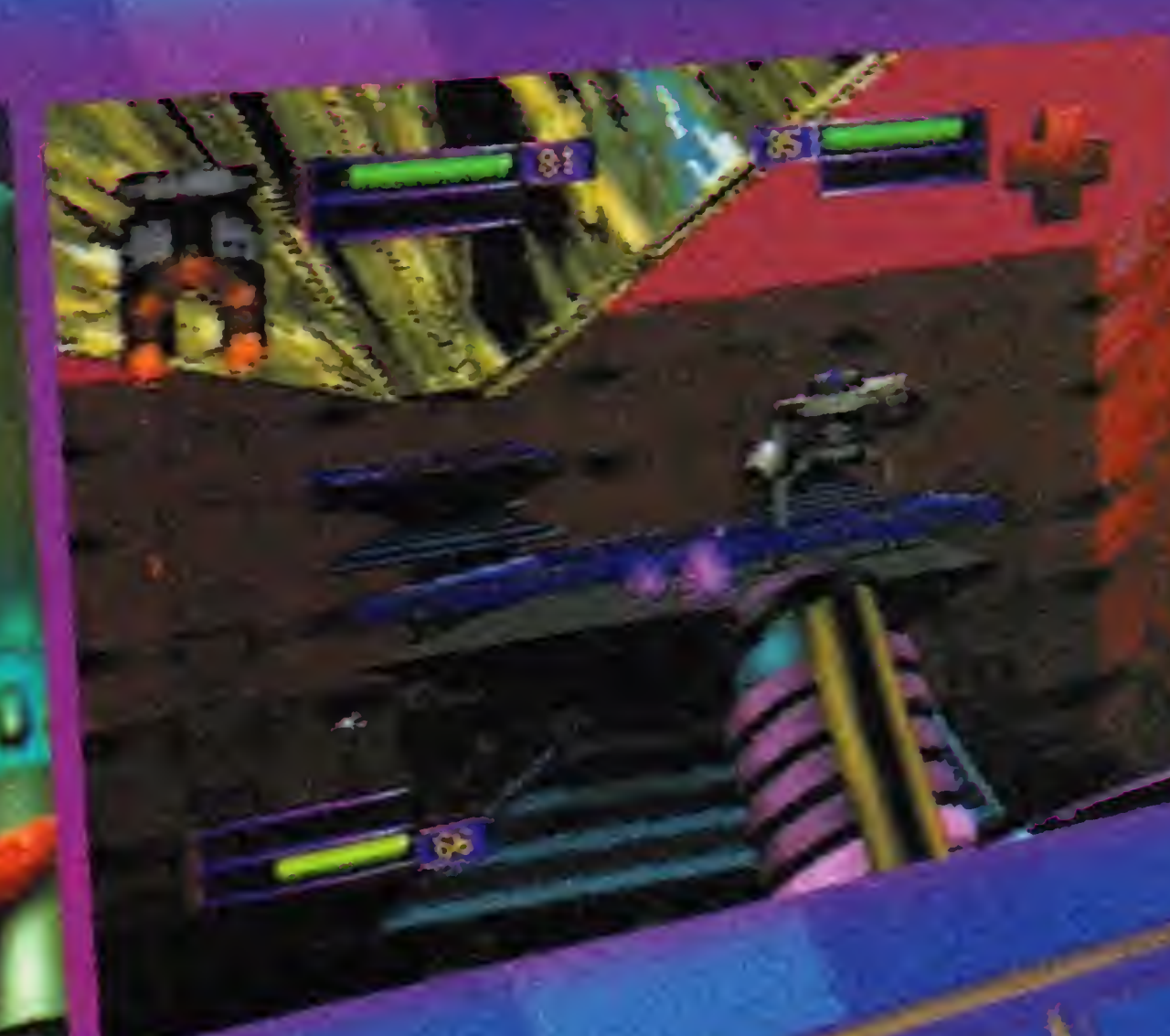
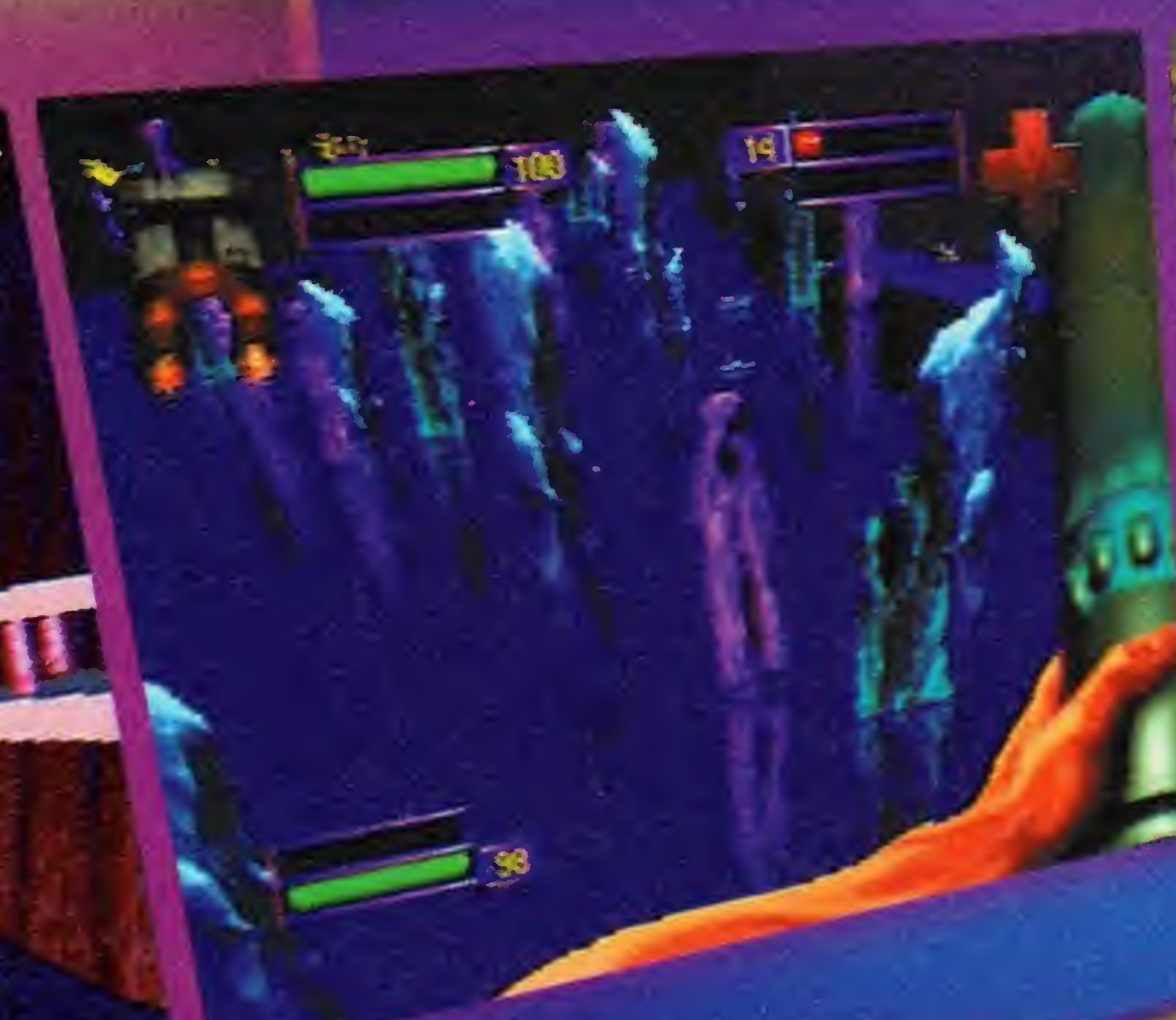
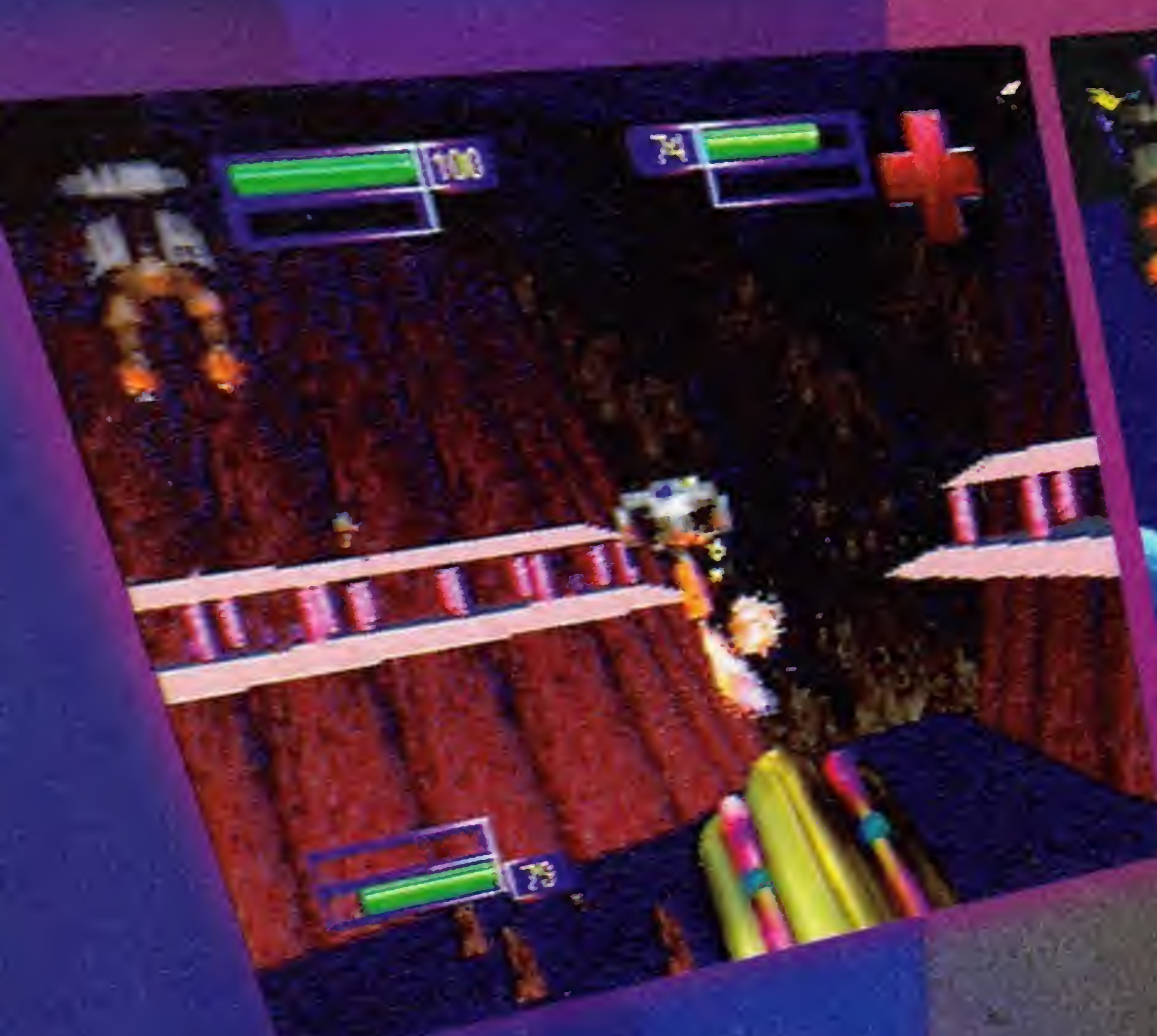
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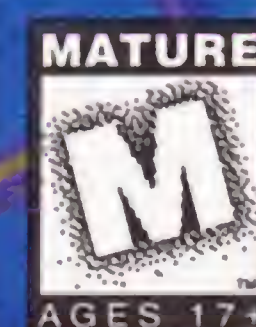
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Wrinkle River Story

Sega of Japan gets ready to release still another RPG for the Saturn — and it's cute as a button



Follow the adventures of Kitchu the magic fox, her companions the squirrel, rabbit, and yes, seed (a.k.a. Putchimoku) who evolves with the story

Format: **Saturn**

Publisher: **Sega Japan**

Developer: **Sega Japan**

Release Date: **June**

Origin: **Japan**

Wrinkle River Story is the latest in an increasingly long list of RPGs available for Saturn in Japan, which is starting to gain a reputation as the Japanese system of choice for this genre, the most popular among the Japanese. While the game uses 2D sprites, it depends heavily on the CD storage capacity of Saturn for improved graphics, sound, music, and overall length.

Wrinkle River is set on the planet Mamuna, where the despot Muma has ruled for years with an iron fist. His dark magic is beginning to run out, however, and if he can't find additional sources of power he will soon "disappear and melt into nature." Seizing the opportunity, the typical

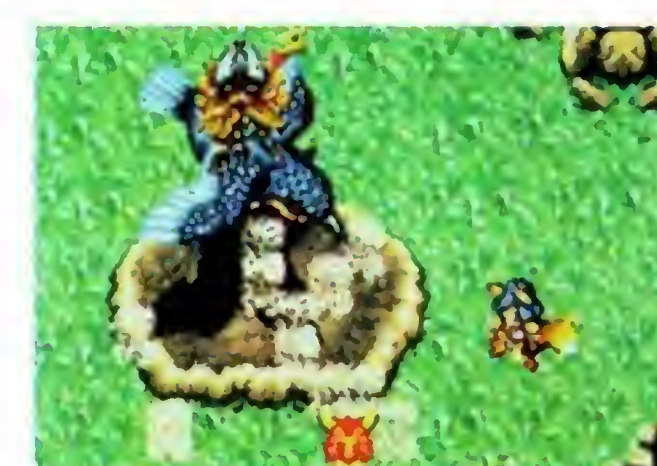
small band of adventurers set out to block him. They're led by Kitchu, a magic fox, and her companions Balel, a squirrel, and Lalala, a rabbit; if this sounds like the game is aimed at a younger audience, it is. In Japan these are known as "kawaii" or "cute" games. Gameplay is still surprisingly sophisticated though, and the level of challenge appears to be quite high.

Consider Kitchu's third sidekick, Putchimoku. Putchimoku begins the game as a seed (with legs and a pair of ears — cute huh?), then slowly grows to maturity over the course of the adventure. Kitchu can use him as a weapon, and as a way to modify certain spells, and the powers change with each stage of Putchimoku's development.

Certainly, this is not the sort of game that's going to appeal to the *Mortal Kombat* audience. With its crisp, colorful graphics, simple, efficient interface, and what appears to be a long, involved storyline, RPG fans may find this one to hard to resist.



Cute though it is, *Wrinkle's* lush graphics are a serious treat



Wrinkle River Story turns its attention to younger gamers with the aim of starting them early, and getting them hooked so they keep coming back

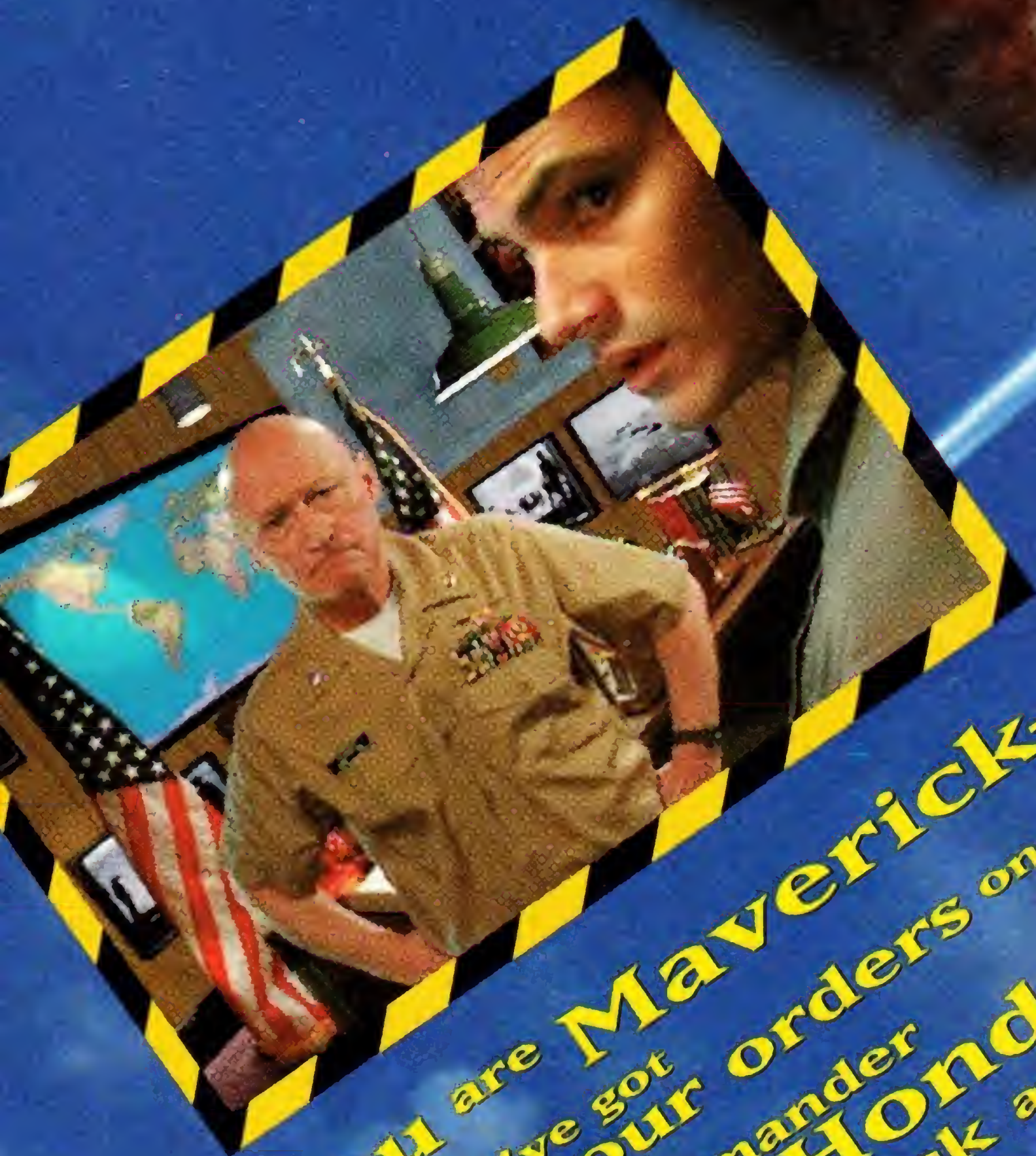


The design isn't new, but the game's size makes good use of CD storage

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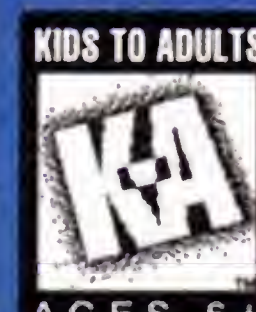
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Dark Earth



Dark Earth's main hook is its intricate world. The broad scope and detail of the game's design is also among its biggest strengths

Format: **PC CD-ROM**

Publisher: **Mindscape**

Developer: **Worldscape**

Release Date: **November**

Origin: **France**

No one ventures into the Dark Earth, where light never shines, the air is thick and cold, and nightmarish creatures roam the darkness

Few game genres have been through more changes over the years than graphic adventures, and with good reason. From the original "high-res" adventures of Apple II's heyday, which added the first graphic screens to text adventures, through to *Alone in the Dark*, which used 3D, polygon-modeled characters on top of 2D, prerendered backgrounds, this visually intensive style of game has responded dramatically to every new change in technology. Especially graphics technology. Now, *Dark Earth* represents the next leap, utilizing not only 3D modeled characters, but adding real-time light sourcing.

The game is set in the third millennium, when things are *really* bad. Years before, a comet passed close to the Earth, showering the planet with thousands of meteorites and enveloping

Mindscape brings the dark into the light for the next generation of 3D modeled graphic adventures



While these game screens are still early, they clearly showcase some of Dark Earth's features. Take note of the extensively light-sourced shadows

the atmosphere in a shroud of black dust. No one ventures into the Dark Earth, where light never shines, the air is thick and cold, and nightmarish creatures roam the darkness.

A few remnants

of civilization still exist. Dotted over the planet's surface are areas where breaks in the clouds allow the light to shine through. These are the Stallites, fortified cites where the survivors of the cataclysm gather to worship the sun god. In these refuges from the dark the last humans try to understand the technology left over from before the comet, and find new ways to conserve and channel the planet's most precious commodity: light.

This setting may be oddly reminiscent of Roger Zelazny's *Jack of Shadows*, but the scope and direction are completely the designers' own. The



The prerendered characters use new techniques to achieve uncanny realism



If this level of graphic complexity seems impressive, understand that the final game should have an even finer level of detail

Stallites are under the protection of the Wise, a religious order of elders who know the secrets of the Runkas, the sons of the sun and the ancient guardians of earth. In the game's strange world, the player takes the role of one of the servants of the Wise, a kind of religious police force which opposes the order of the Disciples of Darkness, which follow the evil Shankr Lord and would destroy the Stallites and send Earth into total chaos.

In an action of subterfuge and betrayal, one of the Wise elders is killed and the player is infected by one of the dark Shankcreatures. Corrupted by Shankr Archessence, he finds himself slowly transforming into a creature of the dark and must begin a quest to purify his blood and rid himself of the evil growing within him. If the player fails, the character is destined to become a misshapen creature of the

If there's one thing the French can claim as their own in game design, it's style. This game has style to burn

dark, forced to survive by absorbing the life force from other beings.

Most of the work on the game is being done at Mindscape's development house in Bordeaux, France. As we've pointed out before, if there's one thing the French can claim as their own in game design, it's style, and *Dark Earth* has style to burn. Not only has there been a great deal of work on developing

the game's backstory and scenario, but an incredible amount of thought has gone into cramming the game's world with as much authentic detail as possible. This is especially important because the game takes place completely inside of a 3D environment, in which it would be extremely difficult to hide much from the player.

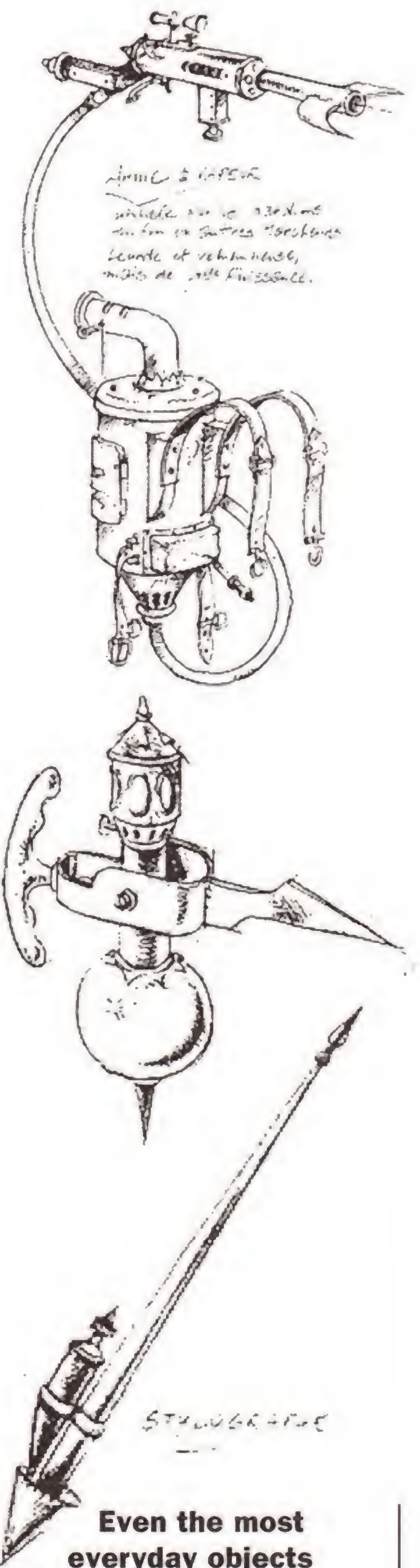
This "go-anywhere-and-look-at-anything" approach is proving to be somewhat time consuming to produce, but the results are worth it — from our initial impressions, *Dark Earth* doesn't look or play quite like any other game.

All characters in the game are fully 3D modeled and texture-mapped, although the game does use prerendered sequences for certain cut-scenes and during some conversations. Even here, however, new technology is being applied, since the designers at Mindscape Bordeaux have developed a new character modeling and animation process. The different features of a character's facial model and texture maps — the eyes, eyebrows, nose, cheekbones, etc. — are chosen separately from a collective character database (somewhat like the "Identikit" process police use to put together composite sketches), so that every character created isn't based directly on any given live model, and is therefore unique.

Likewise, facial animation is broken down into individual movement routines for each expression and spoken syllable, which enables the animator to create extremely lifelike facial movement without the need to motion-capture every single spoken line

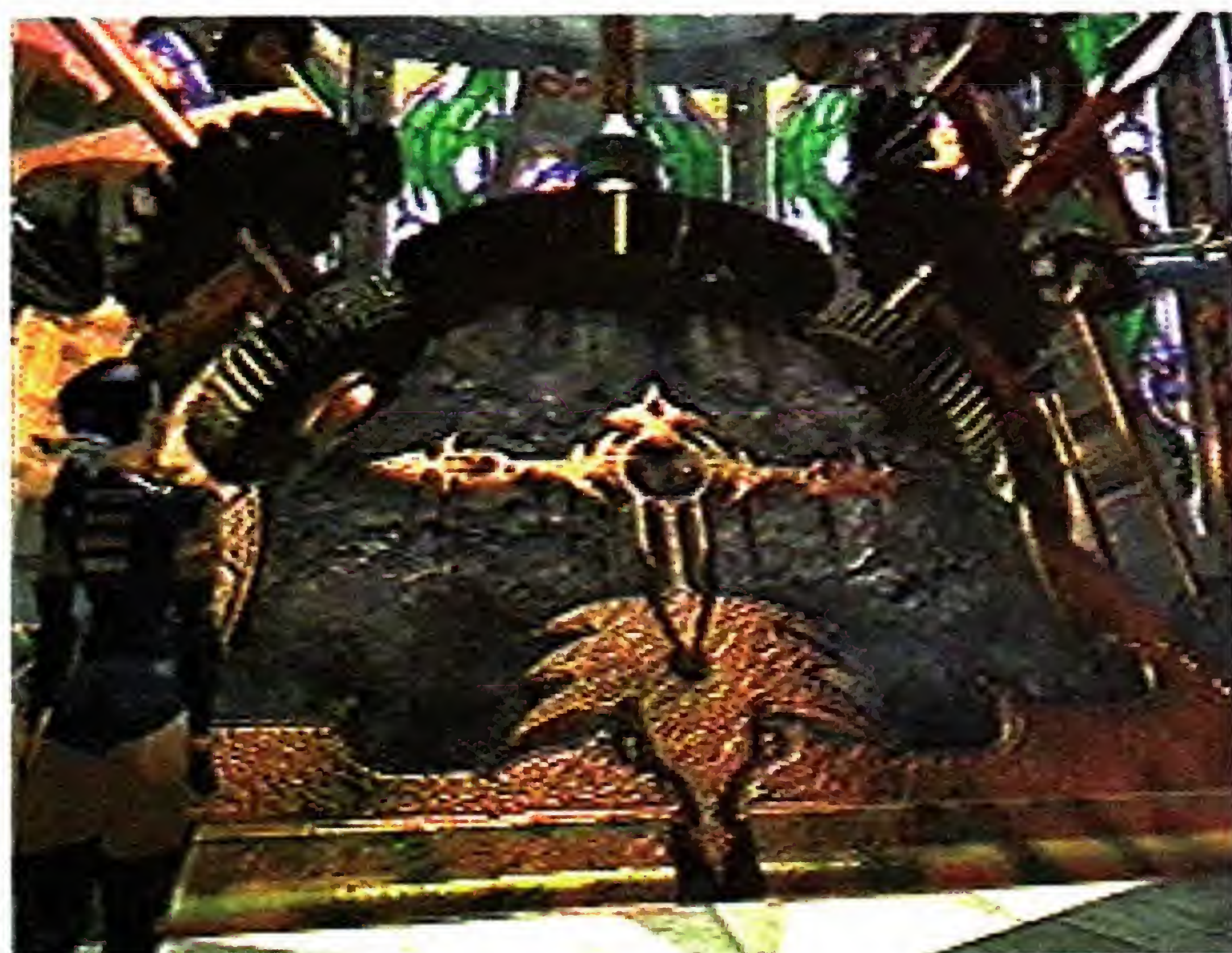
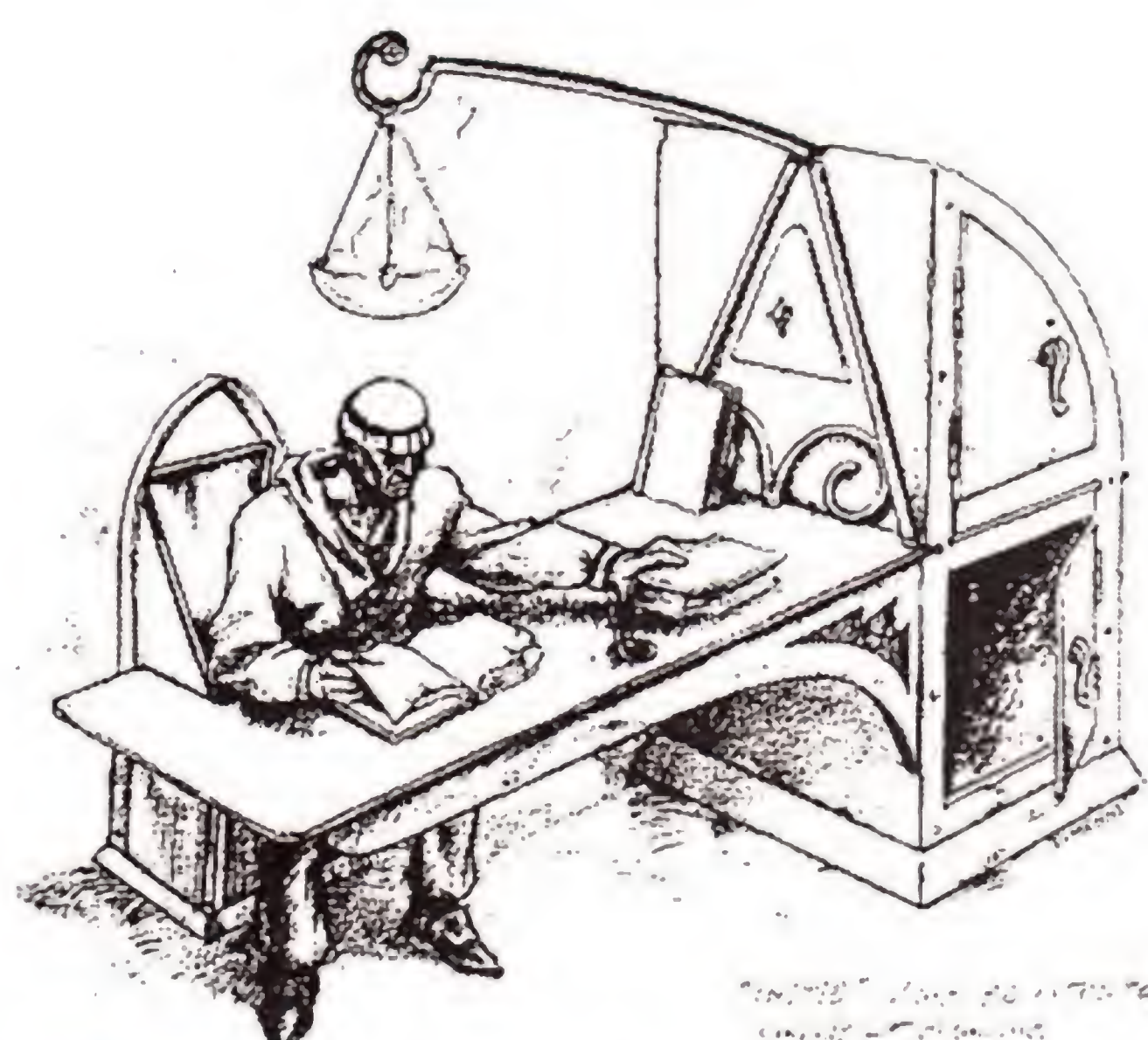


The game's hero is slowly becoming a Shankreature, an evil dweller of the dark

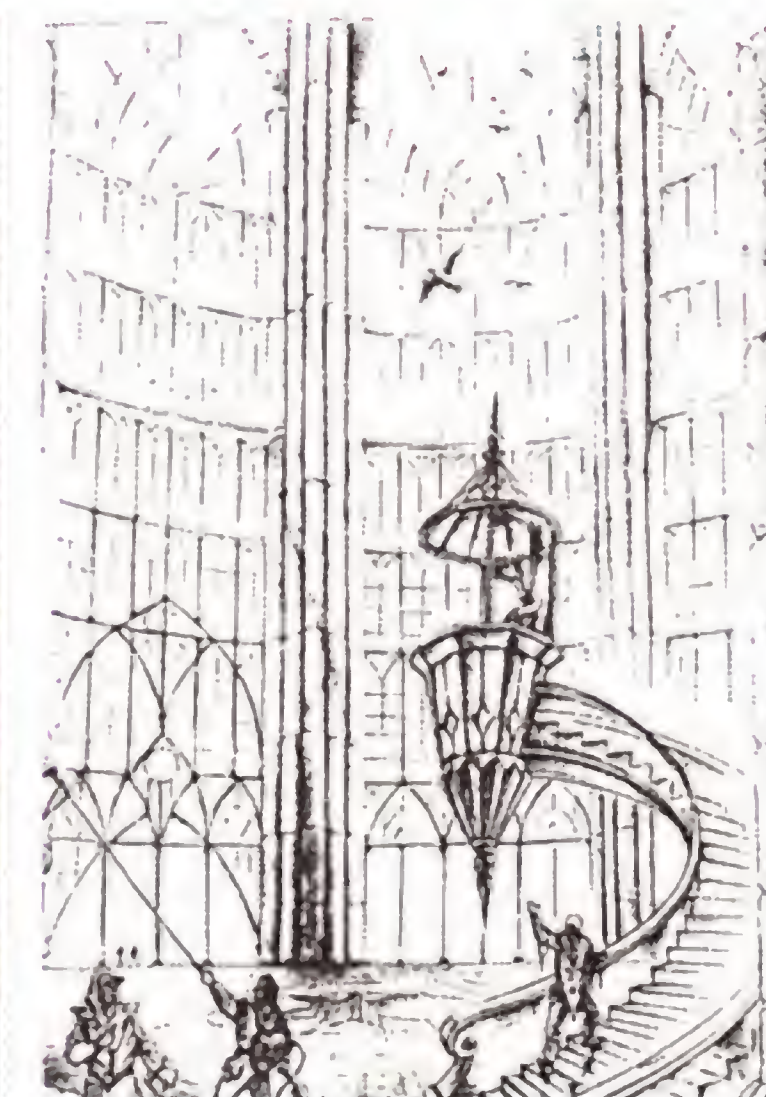


Even the most everyday objects have been thoroughly conceptualized

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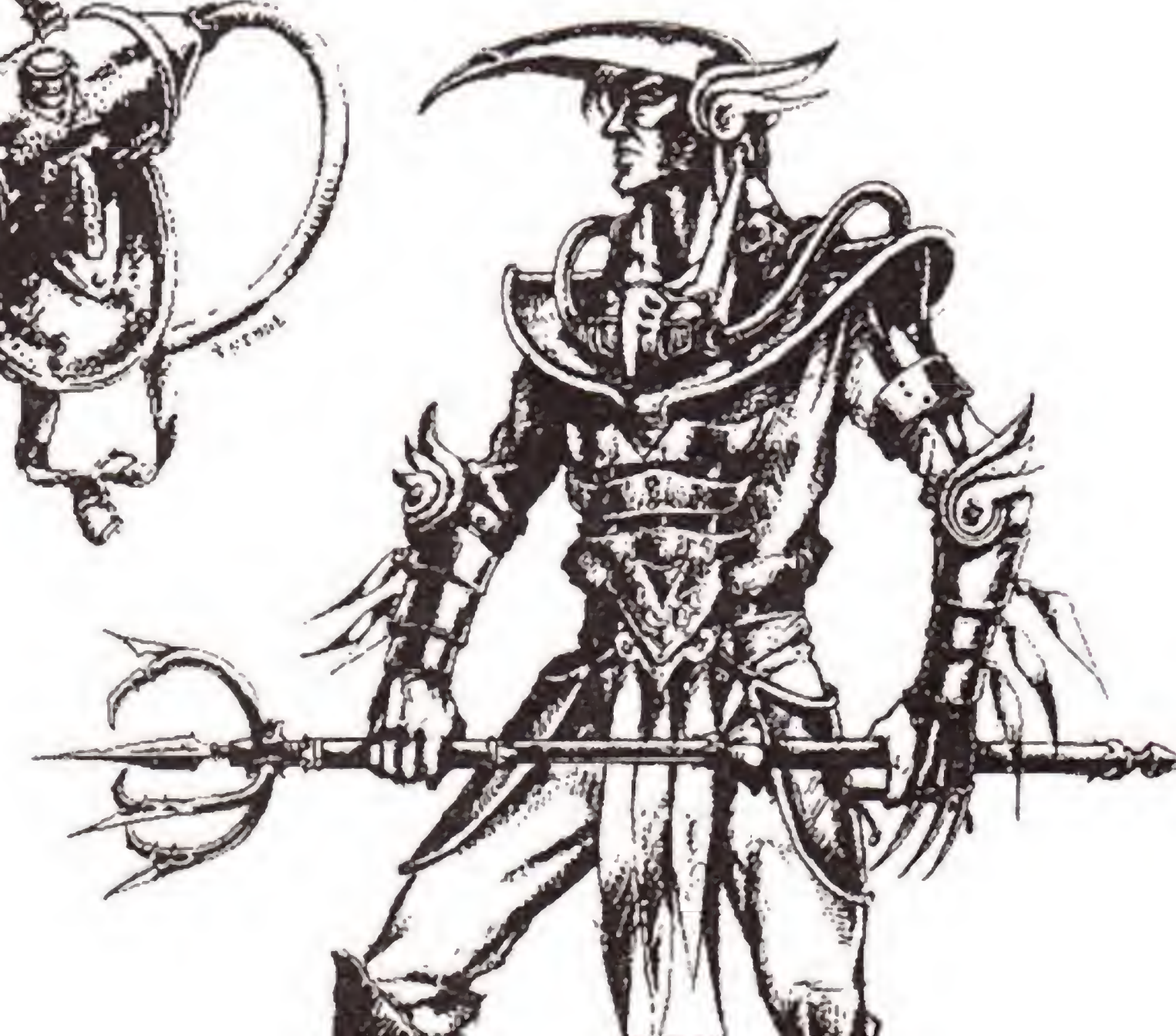
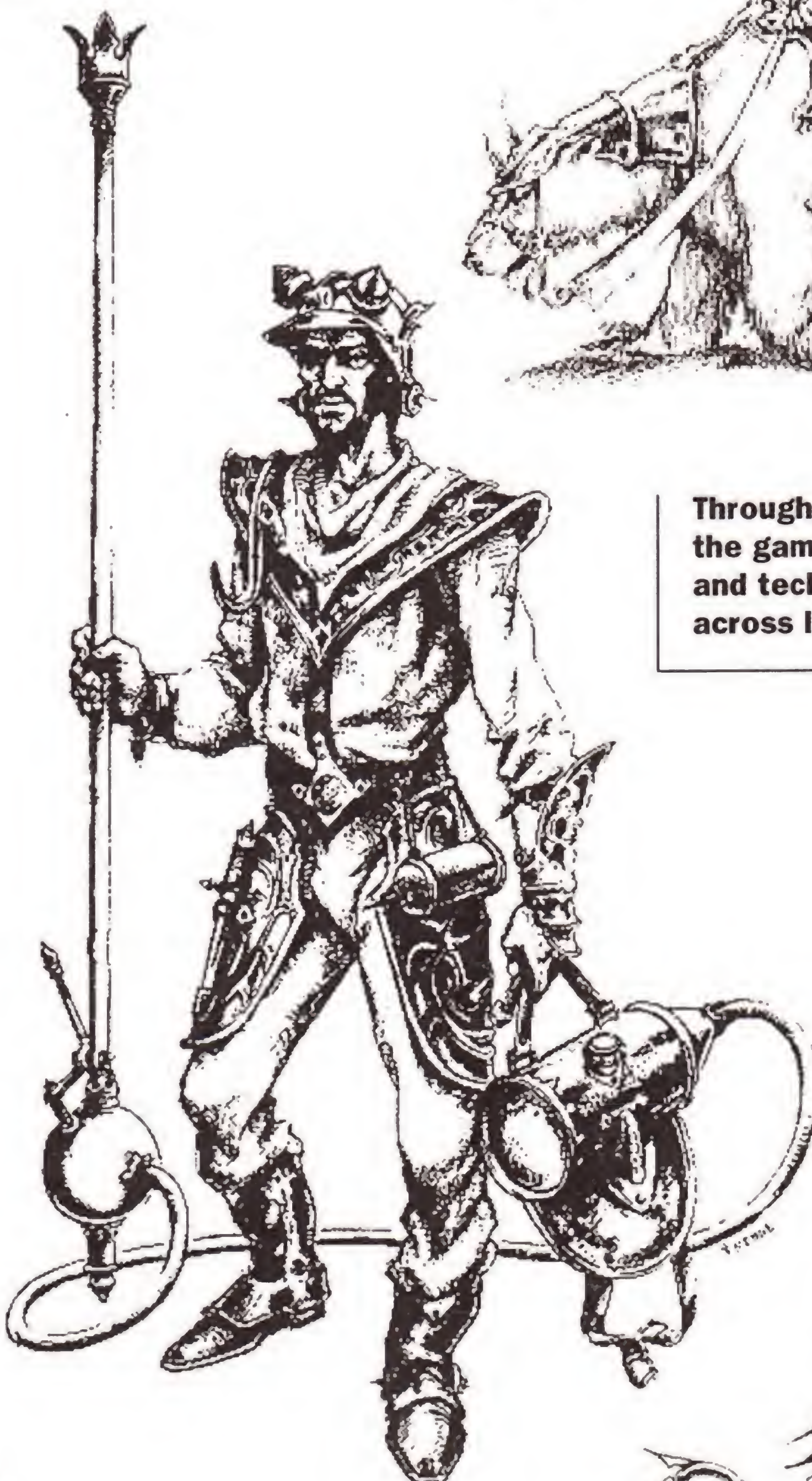
Technology left over from before the disaster merges with new devices designed to harness and channel that most precious resource: light



Dark Earth's unique architecture, a mixture of gothic and industrial influences, is both familiar and strange at the same time



Through superior character design, the game's free-form blend of magic and technology neatly avoids coming across like a "He-Man" episode



Few graphic adventures, past or present, approach the level of depth and complexity that *Dark Earth* appears to have

or facial twitch. This process has been tried before with fair to moderate success, but Mindscape's designers have refined the procedure to produce extremely lifelike motion.

This is good because there are a great many strange and fantastic characters to be encountered in the course of the game. In fact, the backstory is so deep, and the animation process creating the characters produces such impressive results, that Mindscape is currently involved in talks with Paramount TV to produce a weekly syndicated series based on the game. One which, like the Canadian children's show "Reboot," will be entirely computer animated. Mindscape is also planning a spin-off game, yet to be titled but planned for a first quarter '97 release, which would be a military strategy sim based in the same universe.

Few graphic adventures, past or present, approach the level of depth and complexity that *Dark Earth* appears to have. From its neo-gothic architecture, to its odd blend of magic and technology, Mindscape has created what may well be one of the largest and most unique titles of the year.

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Lords of the Realm II



Although this title won't drag action fans to the software stores, those who understand the joys of a slow conquer will truly enjoy this sequel

With a slew of new features, weapons, and interfaces, Impressions' sequel also boasts the promise of realtime combat

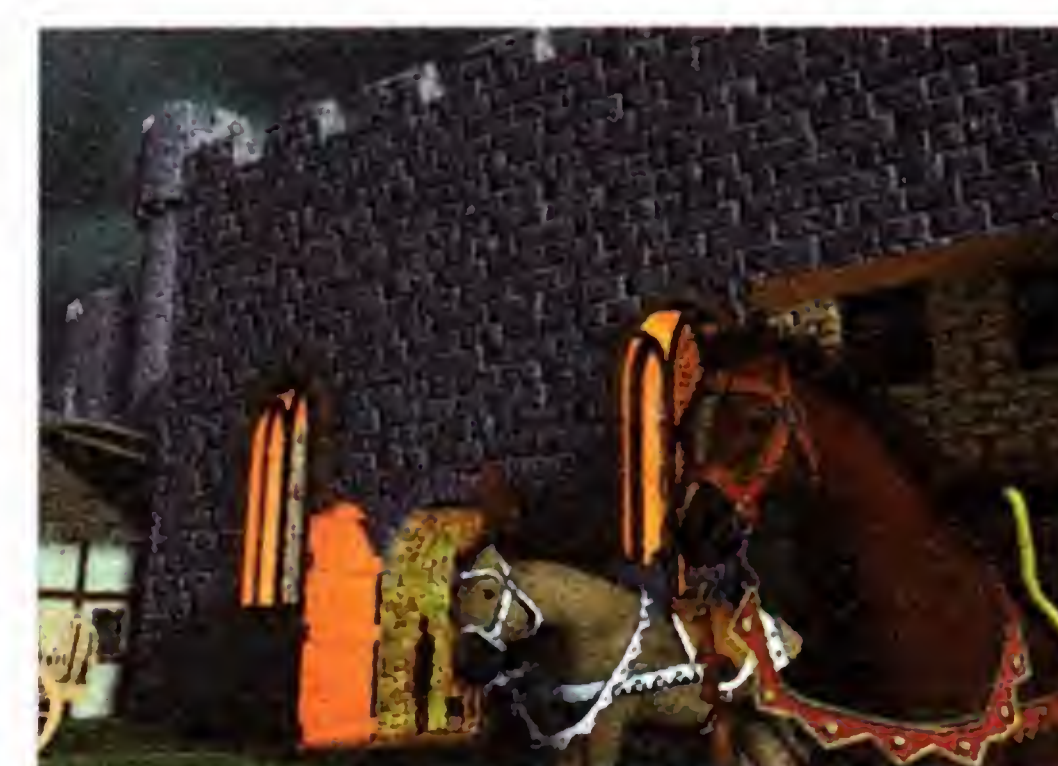
"When you can bring a castle down by aiming a battering ram or a catapult at it in realtime, it's a lot more satisfying"

David Lester, general manager

Format: **PC CD-ROM**
 Publisher: **Sierra**
 Developer: **Impressions**
 Release Date: **Spring '96**
 Origin: **U.S.**

The original *Lords of the Realm* put players in charge of a medieval kingdom and pitted them against the realistic problems of war, poverty, and hunger. Now in Impressions' return to this land of knights and peasants, the company has added an intuitive Windows interface, more enemy interaction, and modem play to create a title that promises to deliver exotic gameplay to fans of economic sims and strategy games alike.

In addition to the incorporation of weaponry like battering rams and



All of the medieval accoutrements of battling kingdoms and economic diversity, from serfs (bottom right), to the king's well-groomed stallions (top right) are here



catapults, *Lords II* will take the same realtime approach to combat that has made games like *Warcraft II* and *Command and Conquer* such hits. Impressions' General Manager David Lester explains, "We wanted the game to be more multiplayer friendly, and one way to do that was by adding realtime combat. Besides, when you can bring a castle down by aiming a battering ram or a catapult at it in realtime, it's a lot more satisfying."

Several levels of player control enable novices to play without needing to understand every aspect of economic control, but enable veterans to exercise very detailed control of what goes on around them. "The micro-management potential is still there," Lester adds. "But it's much easier for people to get by without heavy micro-management."

Despite dozens of different releases in both the sim and strategy categories, none have quite the mixture that *Lords of the Realm II* promises.

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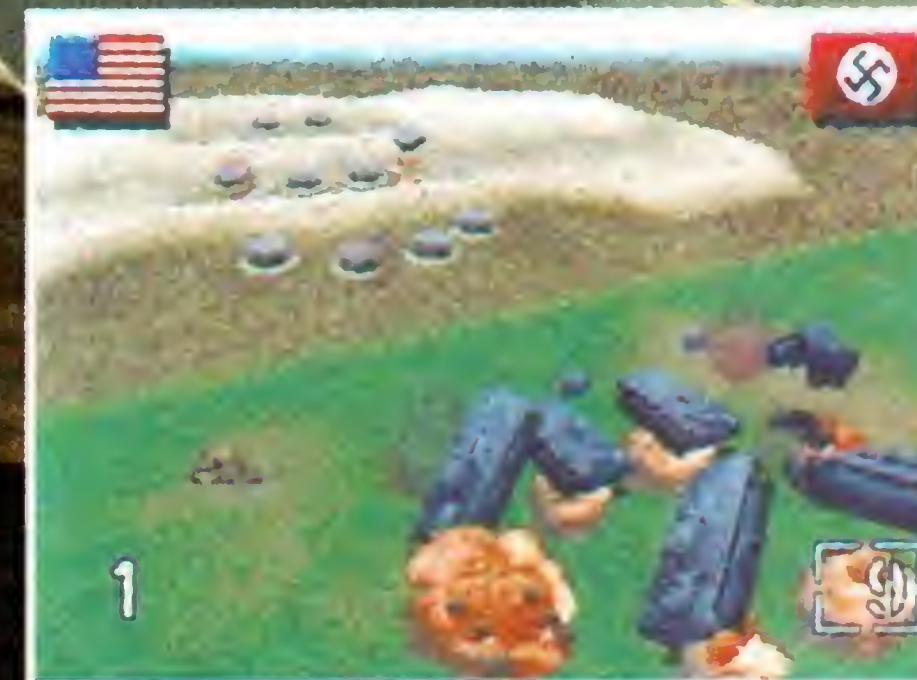


With realtime combat, the game not only becomes more lively, but you practically can feel the battering ram and the catapult taking castles down

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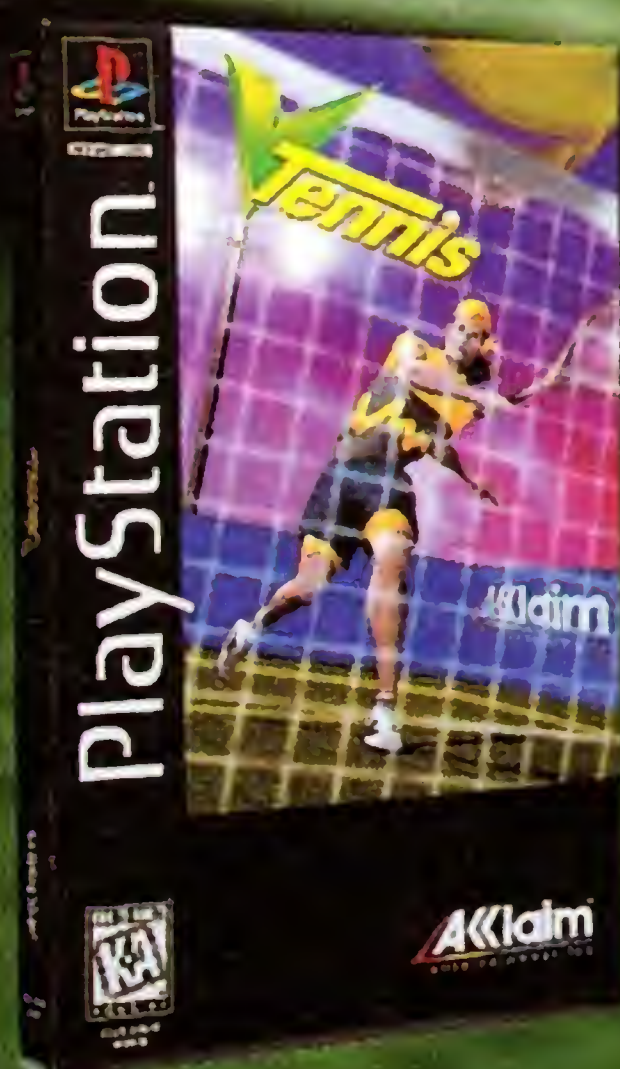
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Leisure Suit Larry 7: Yank-her's Away!

One of gaming's most venerable heroes returns for his *seventh* installment



In *Larry 7*, Mr. Laffer finds himself on a cruise ship populated exclusively (from the passengers to the engineer) by incredibly beautiful women



And check out the "clothing optional" deck, where Larry's greatest challenge resides in getting a naked woman into her clothes — not something with which the lounge lizard has a lot of experience!

In the world of gaming, dozens of heroes come dressed in armor, but it takes a real man's man to brave the perils of a graphic adventure

dressed in nothing more than a white polyester suit. After a two-year hiatus, the infamous Larry Laffer has returned, and Hell's coming with him — if your idea of Hell is being trapped on a cruise ship full of ridiculously gorgeous babes.

Theological concerns aside, *Larry* creator Al Lowe is sticking closely to the form that's carried the series: top-notch animation, top-heavy women, and nary a serious comment to muddy the low-brow humor. Contrary to rumor, the designers have chosen not to go the route of so many games and switch from animation to FMV. Says Lowe, "We explored video, but what we found



Larry finds the only cruise ship captain in the known universe who isn't aging, bald, and male. The term "fantasy gaming" takes on a new meaning



Format: **PC CD-ROM**
Publisher: **Sierra**
Developer: **Sierra**
Release Date: **October**
Origin: **U.S.**

out was, we're writing cartoons here... if we did straight video, it becomes not only ludicrous, but obscene [laughs]... We were going over the list of gags we had and just said, 'oh no, you couldn't even do this with blue screen!' ...what we came back to was that we liked what we'd done in the past and we want to do that even more. We've got a guy drawing babes that could not possibly exist — even Anna Nicole Smith pales in comparison!"

The game's new interface jettisons an icon-driven system in favor of simply clicking anywhere onscreen. This calls up a list of actions possible with that object, from which the player chooses. In a surprise move, the designers have also included a low-end text parser, so that players can enter their own

"We're writing cartoons here. If we did straight video, it becomes not only ludicrous, but obscene"



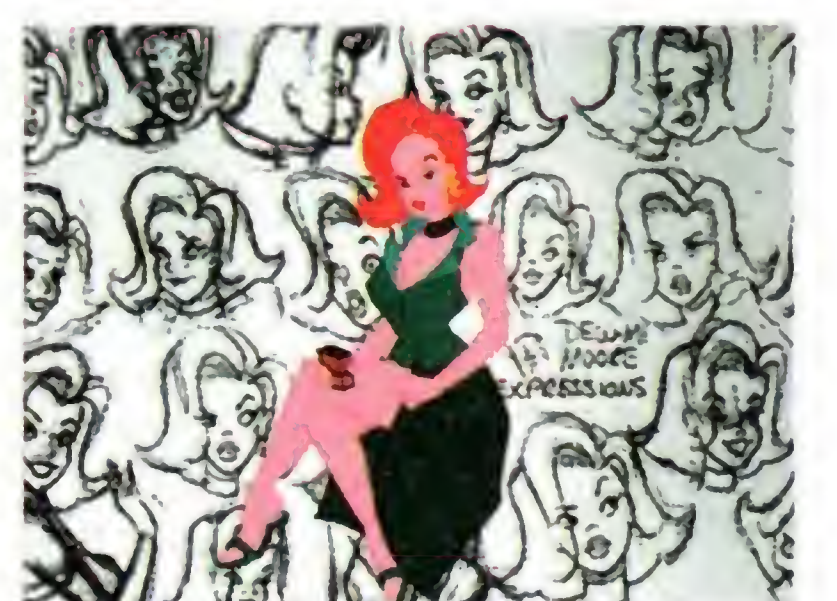
Al Lowe, creator

commands. Says Lowe, "You won't be able to type in a whole sentence but you can type in verbs, and [the program] will recognize a lot of the ones that are obvious. You won't have to do it to finish the game but there will be a few extra things to find and we'll hang a bunch of extra jokes on it..."

The jokes are the heart and soul of the *Larry* series, a tradition Lowe and his team are committed to following. He concludes, "We're definitely swinging a little bit bawdier on this one... [but] the whole point of *Larry* is not the girls or the nudity or the sexual content, it's the humor. We've laughed a lot more than we've talked about sex. If you want real screwin', you're better off renting a video for \$3, but if you want humor, this is the place to go."



Character designs are predictable, although in this case, maybe that's not such a bad thing



The groaner puns are back, too — "Dewmi Moore?" Hoo boy...

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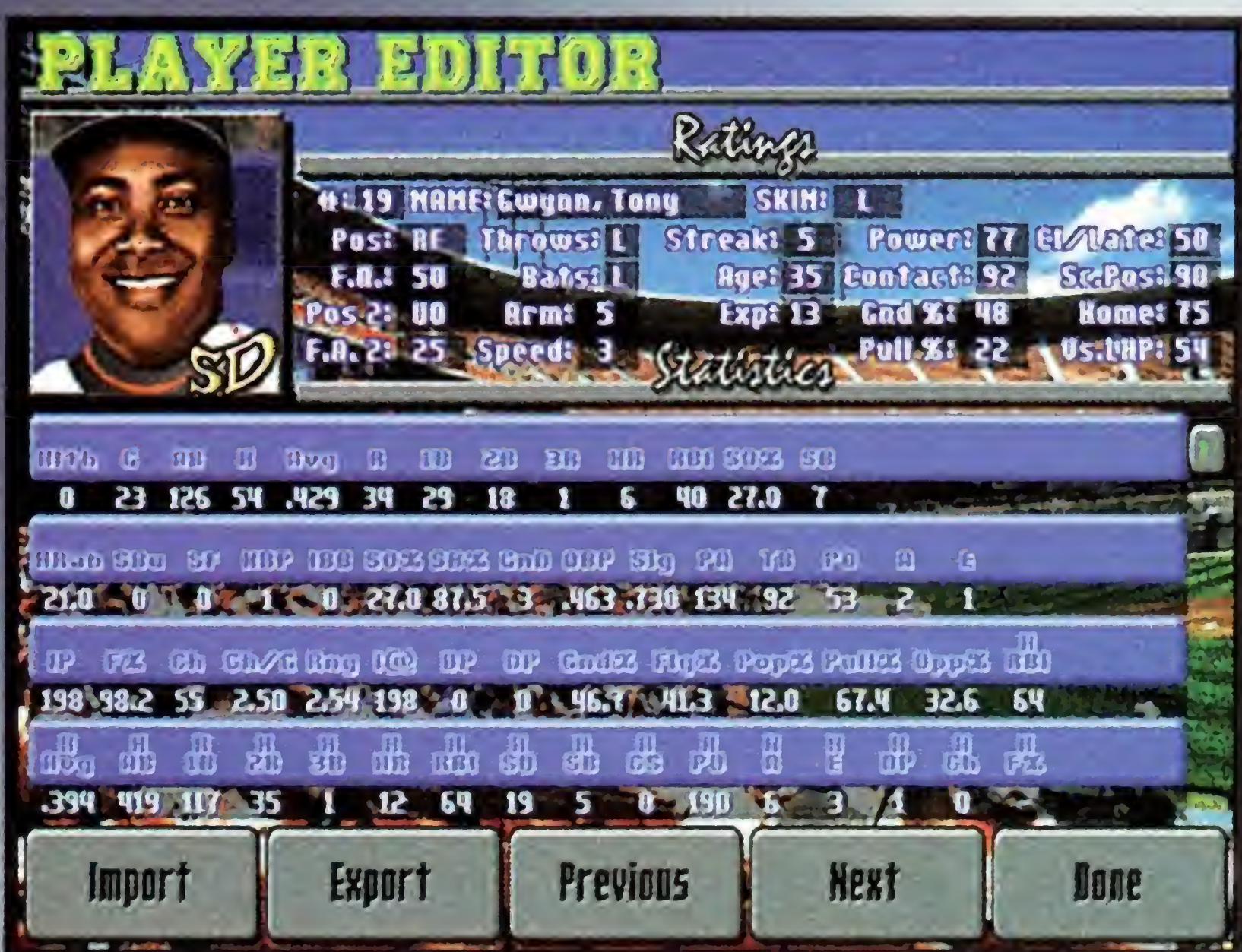
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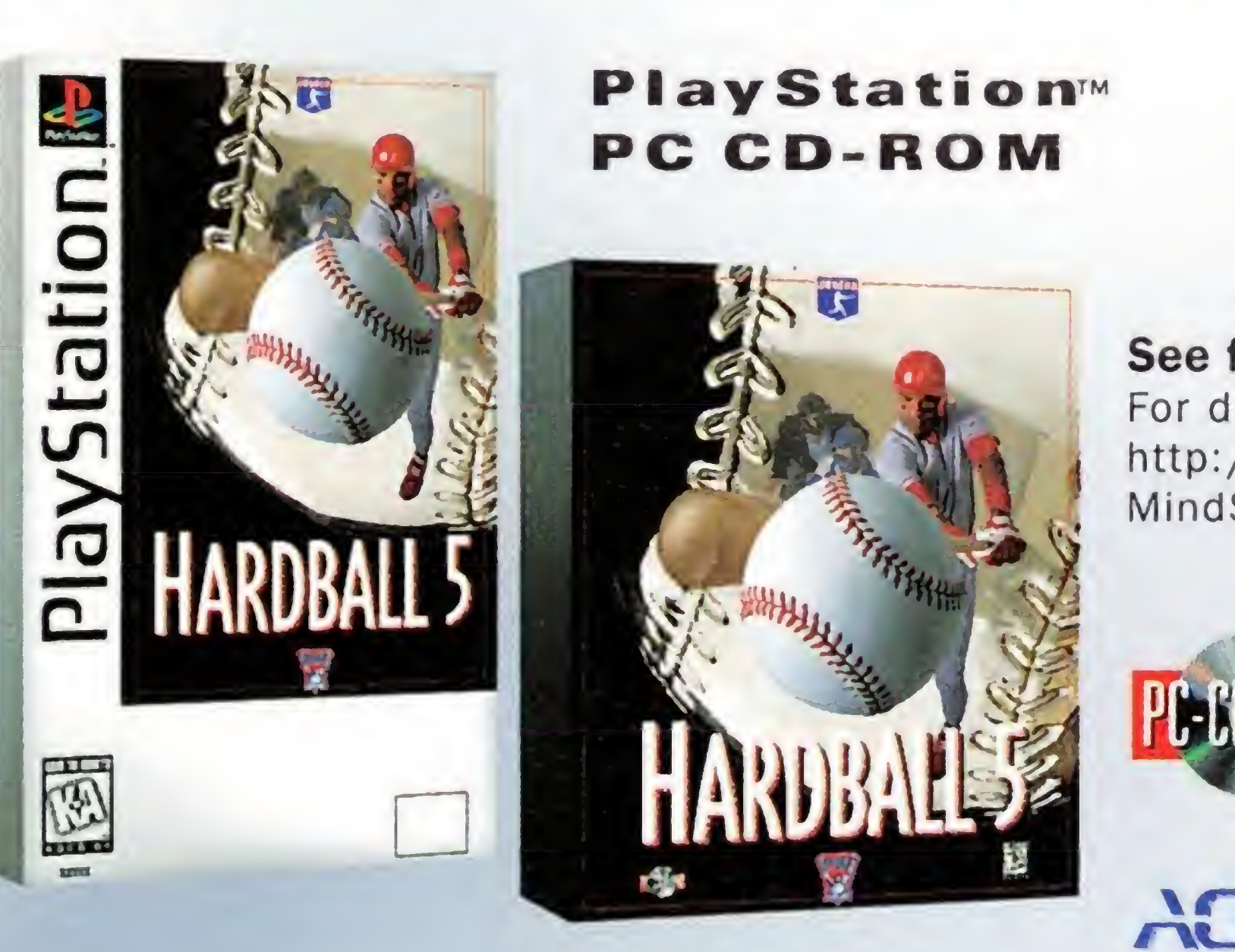
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ng alphas

X-COM: the Apocalypse

Microprose's new sequel makes use of a new engine, and adds character interaction to its "UFO"-based alien invasion combat series

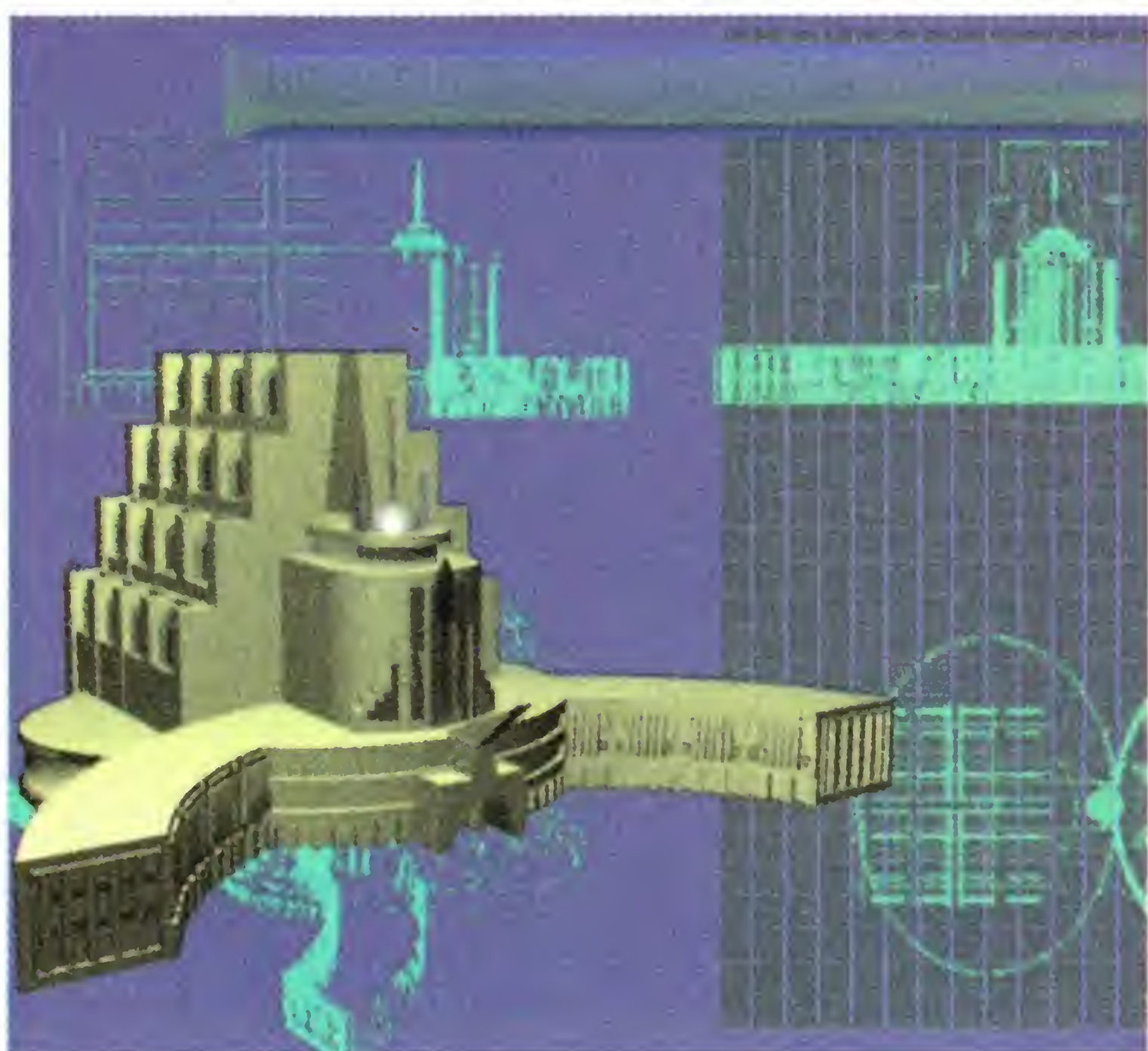
Format: **PC CD-ROM**

Publisher: **Microprose**

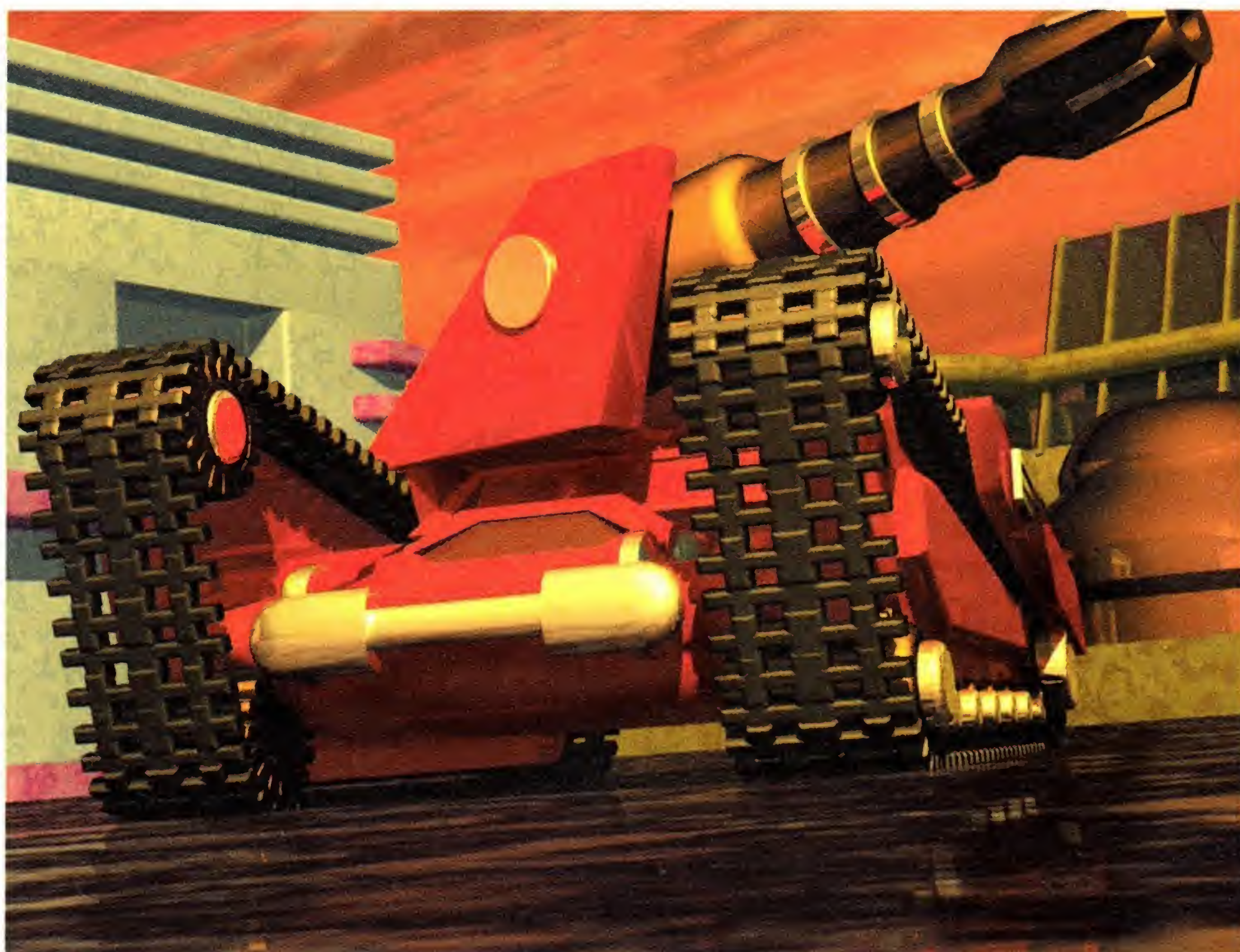
Developer: **Microprose**

Release Date: **winter**

Origin: **U.S.**



The futuristic sprawl of *X-COM III*'s Megapolis has been designed down to the last detail for its 640x480 hi-resolution debut



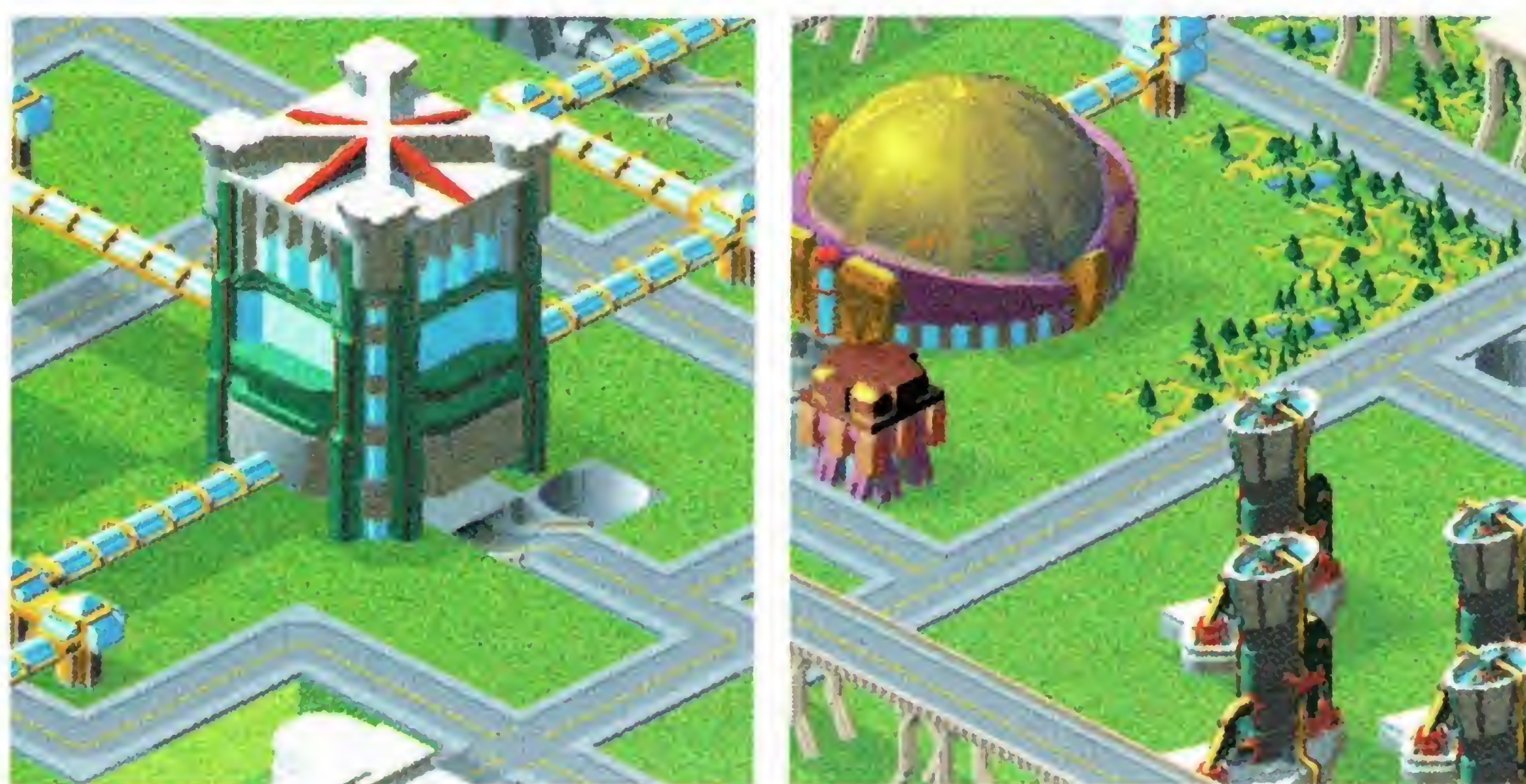
The original *X-COM: UFO Defense* was a deserved hit. Squad-based, tactical combat games rarely get better, and its combination of military strategy and resource management was an irresistible combination few serious gamers could pass up. Its immediate sequel, *Terror from the Deep*, was a mild disappointment because, while it offered the same incredible gameplay, it

offered no additional features or improvements, amounting to little more than a mission disk for the original game. However, if Microprose is to be believed, that was part of the plan all along: to release a quick sequel to satiate the *X-COM*-crazy gameplaying public, and then to design an entirely new engine and expand gameplay in *X-COM* part III.

Hence, *X-COM: The Apocalypse*, which takes the series in a new direction, one even closer in concept to the game's inspiration, Gerry Anderson's "UFO" television series from the early 1970s.

The year is 2084, and for 38 years all of mankind has lived in a single, sprawling, self-contained city called Megapolis. Conditions inside the city had reached a state of near utopia until 2070, when things inexplicably began to fall apart. Civil unrest, crime, and family breakdowns, once thought of as being things of the past, suddenly were on the rise again. The reason? Aliens from

This one takes the series in a new direction, one closer to the game's inspiration, the "UFO" TV series



The city display map. During the invasion phase of the game, combat takes place here, since the alien warships are about the size of a city block

Agents and soldiers have been given a wider range of actions and they are now able to crawl, jump, climb, and even swim

another dimension, of course, taking over the minds of unwary citizens, infiltrating key organizations, and generally causing trouble.

X-COM III takes place almost entirely within the city of Megapolis, and adds character interaction to the series signature squad combat. The game is divided into three distinct phases: Investigation, Intrusion, and Invasion. During Investigation, the player sends out agents to look into any strange occurrences, attempt to determine who's still human and who is an alien puppet, interrogate suspects, recover alien technologies, and try to discover where the aliens' interdimensional gateways are.

If the player is successful at thwarting the aliens' more stealthy approach, the game switches to Intrusion mode, where the aliens simply opt for a massively aggressive all-out attack. Huge warships fly through the gateway, and it's up to the player to maneuver his forces to stop them. During the final phase, Invasion, the player follows the aliens back into their own dimension to destroy the alien dimensional gate control center and end the threat once and for all. In a nice touch, the alien dimension is generated

at random each time you play.

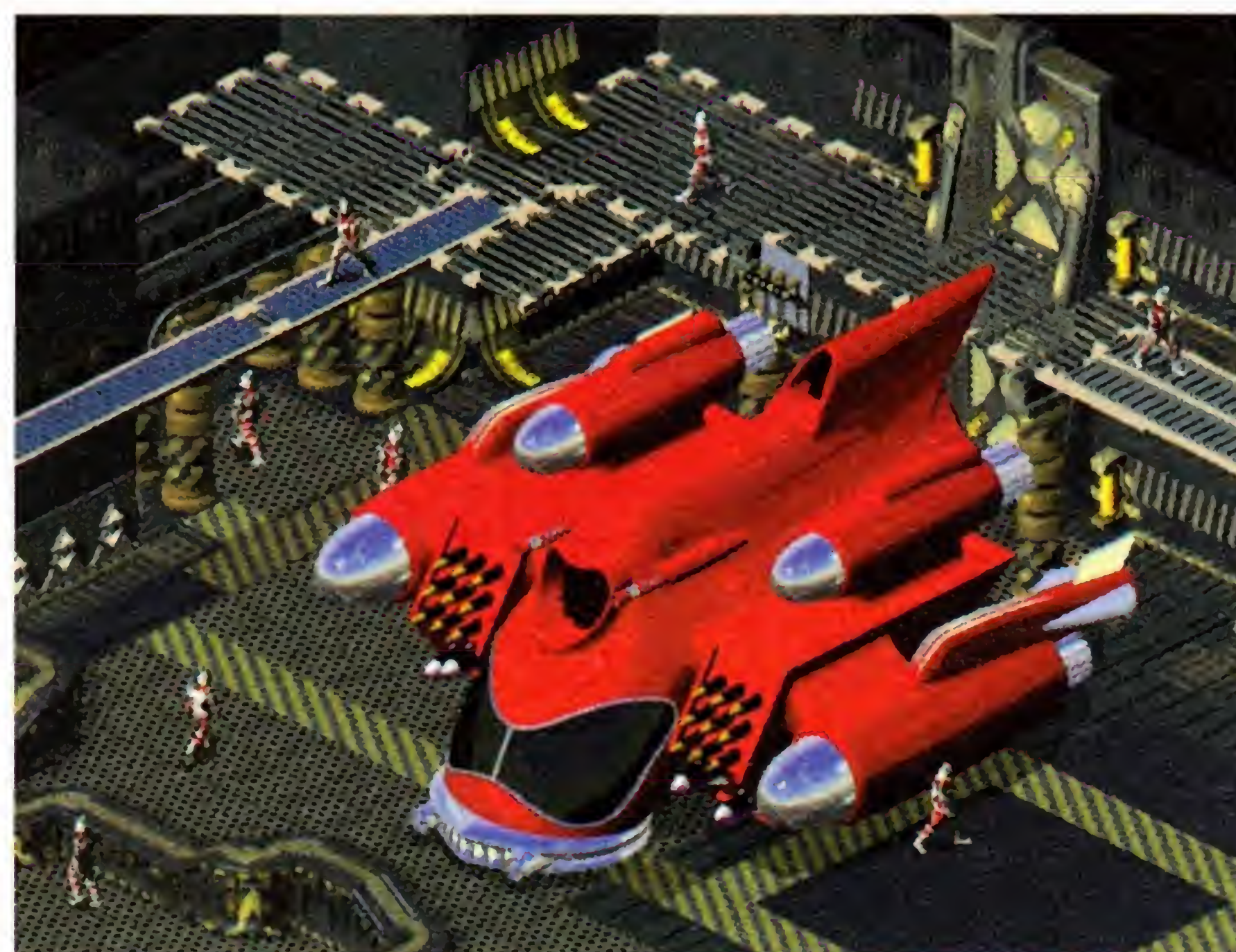
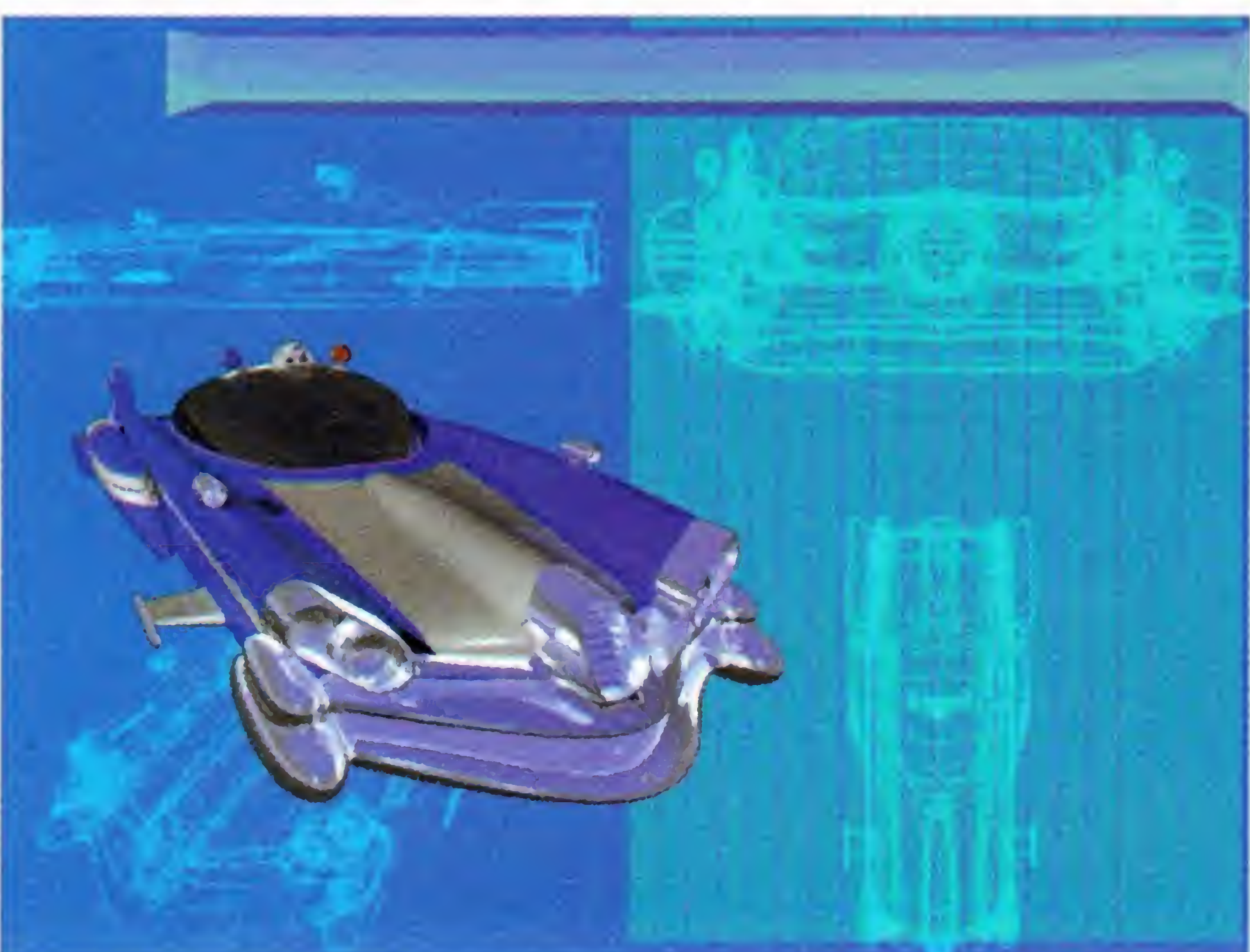
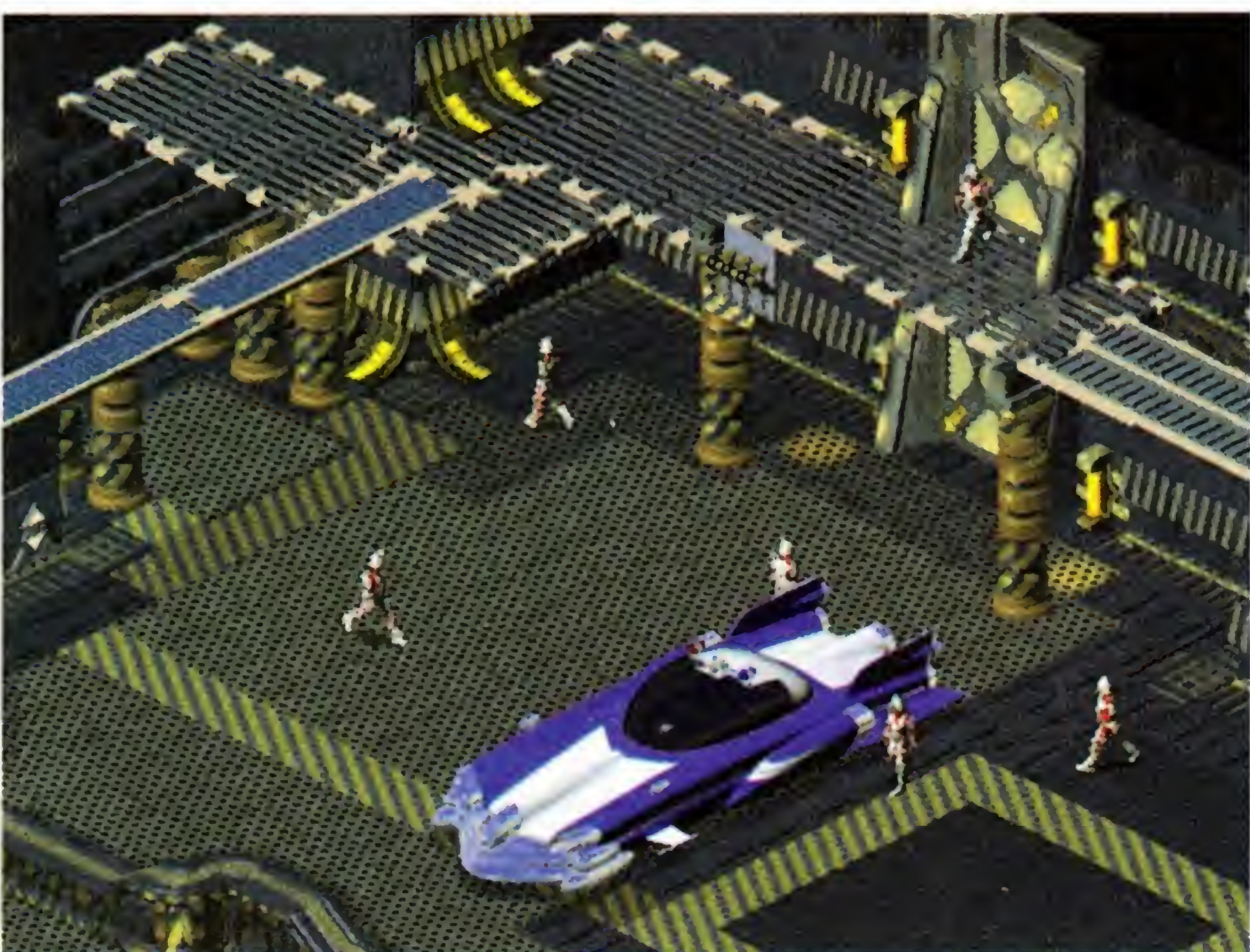
Most of the action is controlled from the city display, a large isometric view of Megapolis that is analogous in function to the world display in the previous two games. From here, the player can control where his agents are sent and can get details of alien activity. The player can then zoom into any area of the city where the traditional *X-COM* action screens take over.

While the three-quarter view will be familiar to anyone who's played *X-COM*, *X-COM III* is presented entirely in 640x480 SVGA mode, giving the player a larger field of view and the graphics a greater level of detail. In addition, agents and soldiers have been given a wider range of actions from the first two games, and they are now able to crawl, jump, climb, and even swim.

The *X-COM* series has provided intense, challenging gameplay through two installments. With its significant improvements and additions to structure and form, *X-COM III* could prove to be the best title of the bunch.



Psst! Hey buddy, seen any aliens? Learn how to sniff them out fast, or the human race is toast



Design concepts on their way from sketch to game graphics. The isometric views of the action screen-shots should be familiar to any gamer who's played *X-COM*

TOKYO HIGHWAY BATTLE

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Prop Cycle

Previously known as a Sega copycat, Namco, reinforces its reputation as an arcade innovator with this new release



In your quest to save the floating city, Solitar, you'll have to burst these balloons for points

Format: **arcade**
 Publisher: **Namco**
 Developer: **Namco**
 Release Date: **September**
 Origin: **Japan**



Agrarian settings abound in this technology-fearing and peaceful society. The harder you peddle, the faster you'll fly

The not-so-quiet revolution at Namco is taking the company in many new obvious directions, as well as a few surprising ones.

The success of the *Tekken* and *Ridge Racer* series fill the former categories well, while games like *Alpine Racer* and *Time Crisis* are, well, more than just nice surprises. They're original concepts, and in the case of *Alpine*, it was a risk that's now paying off.

Except that now, Namco's newest crop of games, especially *Prop Cycle*, are more original and bizarre than just about anything presently in the arcades.

Prop Cycle is a funky looking one-player contraption, and it's bound to attract people simply because of its odd look. Players sit on what's essentially a bicycle and pedal the propeller-cycle (a kind of hang glider) against time to save a lost city from floating away.

Sound weird? The story is based on a fantastical theme, in which a small, peaceful, technology-fearing

village is thrown into chaos when a mysterious and evil character touches the town's sacred alter. Obviously, there's a damned good reason it wasn't supposed to be touched because now the city is floating away. It's your mission to propel — peddling, literally — through the sky to save Solitar, the village, from turning into a lost birthday balloon.



Environments like this have the potential to lure newcomers to gaming

When Next Generation spoke with Namco, there were three levels being worked on, and a fourth, Solitar, which is the finale. By pedaling through the air, popping time-saving balloons, avoiding time-deleting balloons, using some balloons to bounce off of, and maneuvering a path through tunnels, clouds, and other harrying obstacles, you'll be able to beat the time limits and complete the mission. Namco has fixed the "bike" up with some clever flight maneuvers. You're capable of controlling the bike's direction and can fly straight up into the heavens or even pull off 360 degree overhead loops, though it's not certain whether the game will pull players through on rails or if it will be entirely free moving.

The Super System 22 board is used here, and will guarantee the solid polygons and texture-maps for which Namco is known.

The success of *Alpine Racer*, an arcade game that a company like Capcom would never comteplate making, has enabled the developers at Namco to really cut loose in terms of what's do-able in the arcades. But whether *Prop Cycle* will be a flop or a wild success isn't as important as Namco's break into creative and original ground.



ng alphas

Heroes of Might and Magic II

Coming into what may be the best year for strategy gaming ever, New World Computing seeks to set a new standard in a market of giants

Heroes of Might and Magic II looks to have incorporated the plot in a way that pulls players closer to the action onscreen

Format:	PC CD-ROM
Publisher:	New World Computing
Developer:	New World Computing
Release Date:	October
Origin:	U.S.

Late last year, New World Computing released its *Heroes of Might and Magic*, starting what now seems to be a new trend in the PC world, that of creating an RPG or adventure license and then later using it for strategy oriented sequels. *Heroes of Might and Magic* turned out, despite what early skeptics predicted, to be more than just a way to squeeze a name for a little more money. In the end, it was one of the best strategy titles of 1995, no small feat



Heroes' intro sequences are beautifully detailed and quickly draw players into the story

when you consider that the competition include games like *Command and Conquer* and *Warcraft II*. Now, New World is stepping out into the arena again with a sequel that's set to deliver a great deal more of what players enjoyed about *Heroes of Might and Magic*, while trying to present a new atmosphere of adventure and plot evolution that is all its own.

From the beginning,

players will notice a large change about *Heroes of Might and Magic II*. An intriguing new storyline explains how the country has become divided, each supporting one of the past regent's two sons. Archibald, who is evil, foul, and ambitious, has taken the crown for himself through intimidation and murder. Now his good brother Roland, who has been pinned for the crimes, seeks to return the crown to its rightful place with a band of loyal followers. Players can choose to take the side of either Roland or Archibald, controlling the actions of several the



Many of the original game's enemies have returned to the fight



Although still in early development, each of the game's various combat units can be seen in a variety of different levels of effectiveness



Players will have a chance to explore territories that are larger than ever before, with the future of the entire kingdom hanging in the balance



land's heroes, and their often supernatural followers.

The game is split up into several different scenarios, differing according to the player's choice of sides and the current warfare situation. As Roland, players will need to convince the populous that the discredited prince was not responsible for the crimes that were committed in his name, and begin turning the forces of the kingdom to his side. Those who prefer the dark side of adventuring will need to stop the young hero by taking as many towns as possible and preventing further growth of peasant revolt. Although many games are crippled by the intrusion of hard-to-follow storylines into what should be solid gameplay, *Heroes of Might and Magic II* looks to have incorporated the plot in a way that pulls players closer to the action onscreen.

More than just a new set of scenarios, *Heroes of Might and Magic II* is a full sequel, offering new terrains for combat, new character options and improvements, as well as a new set of structures in cities and villages. Players will need to learn different tactics for fighting in swamps and deserts, in addition to learning new tricks to increase their chances in snow and lava conditions.

As their heroes gain experience, they will begin to improve a set of secondary skills that may help them in these dangerous terrains, or in other areas of army management. Current skills include such variations as snow

movement, which helps a hero's followers get through arctic areas; espionage, which gives a player full knowledge of his opponent's heroes and towns; siege master, which gives players more attacks with their catapult during an assault on home ground; and even good observer, a skill enabling a hero to determine what kind of magic is being used against him. Wandering armies will also be found and, if the hero who finds them has enough charisma, they can be negotiated with, rather than fought, under the right circumstances. These features, along with scores more, promise to add an entirely new dimension to an already solid title, and to give players nearly limitless possibilities in their approach to winning.



With its release right around the corner, *Heroes of Might and Magic II* is up against some stiff competition. Realtime strategy has gained a major foothold in the PC game market, and it's going to take a powerful release to be able to combat titles like Virgin's *Z*, Westwood's *Command and Conquer* follow-ups, and the multiplayer version of Looking Glass' *Terra Nova*.

Even so, with its powerful and compelling storyline, enormous depth of gameplay, and crisp fantasy artwork, New World may have a title that can keep gamers glued to their screens one step at a time.

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The new plotline, detailing the battle between two brothers who are fighting for the crown, adds a great deal to the atmosphere of the game

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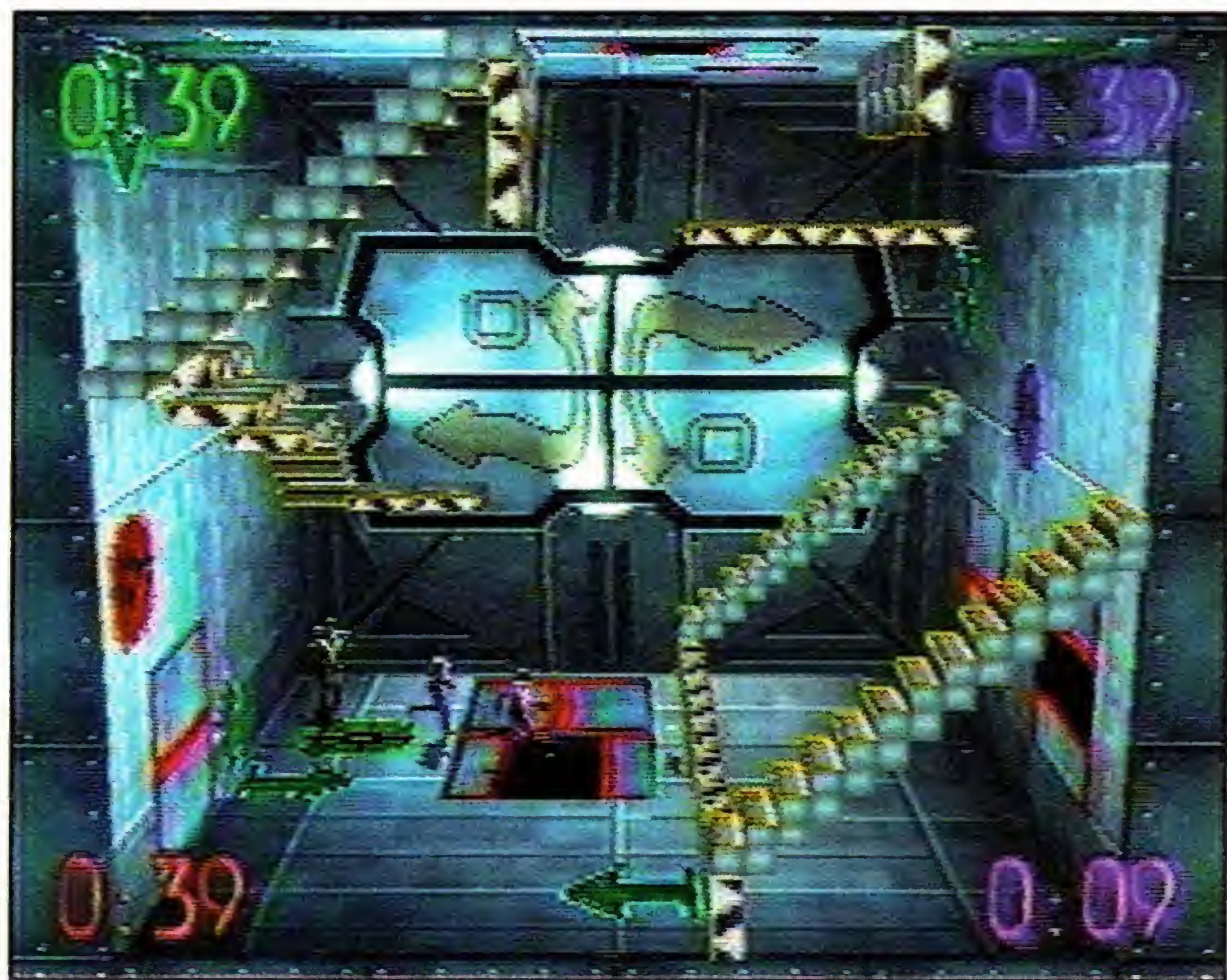


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Blast Chamber



Although the quality of these early screens is a little blurry, you can still get a good feel for the game's gritty *Blade Runner* style of graphics

Playing against a human is always more fun than playing against a computer, and a four-player game can increase the amount of fun exponentially — just look at *Super Bomberman II* for the Super NES, arguably one of the best games of all time. Now Activision wants in on the action, and the result is *Blast Chamber*.

There is a one-player game here, but the real fun will come with the addition of a multi-tap and some friends. The basic concept of the game is simple. Each character has a time bomb

There is a one-player game here, but the real fun will come with the use of a multitap and some friends

strapped to his or her back. Before the time runs out and the character explodes, he or she must obtain control of a crystal and place it on a special transmitter (there is one for each player), which will increase the time before the bomb goes off. The last player alive wins. Of course, there are other

Activision hopes to score a major hit with the first nonsports four-player game for PlayStation and Saturn

Format: **Saturn, PlayStation**

Publisher: **Activision**

Developer: **Activision**

Release Date: **November**

Origin: **U.S.**

nuances — placing the bomb in another player's transmitter decreases their time to detonation, for example.

The game is set in cube-shaped rooms (40 different single-player levels and 20 multiplayer rooms), criss-crossed with catwalks, traps, rope swings, stairways and other obstacles. The most stunning feature (and one that takes full advantage of PlayStation's and Saturn's 3D capabilities) is that rooms can be rotated.

The ability to rotate the cube adds a novel strategy element, one we haven't seen before. While it remains to be seen if the game will help to sell a million multitaps, early versions were refreshingly addictive.

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As characters hit the walls, the room turns, spilling your enemies and dislodging the crystal you'll need to gain more time



Boom! A timer hits zero and a character blows up. When you play with four players, expect lots of cursing and shouting as the timer approaches zero

ng alphas

Rayman 2



Rayman faces a new villain, Mister Dark, whose army of robots are bent on turning Rayman's entire planet into a giant industrial landscape

Side-scrolling platform games rarely looked or played better than the original *Rayman* — But can it be topped?

Format: **PlayStation, Saturn, PC CD-ROM**

Publisher: **UBI Soft**

Developer: **Climax**

Release Date: **November**

Origin: **U.S.**

Dark, who needs to be hunted down and defeated in order to stop this industrial onslaught.

Rayman uses his fists to stop his enemies, and in *Rayman 2*, he gets a new arsenal of pugilistic projectiles to choose from, including the Fire Fist that travels horizontally, then snaps straight down at the touch of a button; a Platform Fist, which hangs in the air for a short time so Rayman can jump on it; and the Hook Fist, which he can use to grab far-away platforms and haul himself up, or grab distant items and pull them back. And, the player can find diving equipment to travel underwater, and a drill to travel underground.

Like its predecessor, *Rayman 2* looks to break little ground in either design or play mechanics, but simply be a well made and entertaining game that delights players' eyes and thumbs.



Design has strayed from the pure sprite artwork of the original to pre-rendered characters



Although design work is still in its early stages, the characters show imagination and flair

The original *Rayman* was one of the more lightweight and enjoyable platform games available last year. While it certainly contributed nothing new to the genre, it was large, colorful, controlled extremely well, and included enough humor, challenge, and surprises to delight all but the most jaded gamer. Now the little troupier of indeterminate species is about to return in a follow-up, which promises to be every bit as good-looking and playable as the original.

Rayman's colorful world has been invaded by robots from space.

Unimpressed with the lush vegetation, rolling hills, and glistening candy landscapes, all these aesthetically challenged androids seem to want to do is cover the planet's surface with a flat expanse of iron and steel. Behind this invasion is the evil, mysterious Mister



As in the original, players can expect lush stage designs that are pleasing to the eye and a challenge to the fingers

Rayman uses his fists to stop his enemies, and in *Rayman 2*, he gets a new arsenal of pugilistic projectiles



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IRON MAN™ AND X-O MANOWAR™

The NUTS

MAKING METAL Over a year in the making and nearing its final stages, Marvel Comics' IRON MAN and Valiant Comic's X-O MANOWAR appear in HEAVY METAL, one of Acclaim's most ambitious video game endeavors to date. By utilizing the full capabilities of their Motion Capture Studio (the same studio used in the making of the Batman Forever video game, and other games such as Frank Thomas Big Hurt Baseball and Alien Trilogy), Acclaim is bringing IRON MAN and X-O MANOWAR's comic book universes to revolutionary digital life and bringing the metal titans together for the first time.

Located in their Glen Cove, NY headquarters, the Motion Capture Studio is the jewel in the crown of Acclaim's technological empire. The black rubber stage with its four high-resolution, black-and-white cameras was the scene for the human modeling of HEAVY METAL'S punching, kicking, running, flying, and jumping movements. Captured on film via reflective sensors on actors' black rubber suits, hand-drawn comic art, by veteran artists Bart Sears and Dave Johnson, was wrapped around

the digital framework of the fighting movements. The end result is movement so lifelike, so fluid, you'll be running for cover. The same treatment was applied to YELLOW JACKET, BLACKOUT, ABSORBING MAN, GLADIATOR, the SPIDER ALIENS and a galaxy of other villains.

Through the use of completely rendered CGI and SGI computer graphics, both the characters and backgrounds have a highly-detailed, 3-dimensional appearance. HEAVY METAL takes this revolutionary technology to previously unreachable levels of realism. You'll never look at video games the same way again.



SPARKS WILL FLY Out of all this technology comes the meat of any self-respecting video game — the gameplay! From the small but riveting demo that I played, I can tell you that IRON MAN / X-O MANOWAR: HEAVY METAL delivers. You'll get to rampage your way through seven levels ranging from the R&D lab of Stark Industries to the South American rain forest and the New York subway (not to mention Arnim Zola's living



Advertisement



HEAVY METAL THE VIDEO GAME & BOLTS of it.

By Edward Marcus



castle)—each with its own different environmental effects. But you'll need more than just a quick trigger finger and a hard right cross to make headway in HEAVY METAL. Only by using strategy to complete your missions will you be able to reach the secret final bonus level: an apocalyptic, one-on-one battle between IRON MAN and X-O MANOWAR!

It's a given that heavy weaponry is a crucial element of IRON MAN / X-O MANOWAR: HEAVY METAL. IRON MAN's arsenal includes Laser and Proton Blasts, Visible Light Beams, Repulsor Blasts, and

Force Fields, while X-O MANOWAR relies on his Ion Cannon, Cellular Disrupters, Iron Sword, Armadillo Mode and Illumination Omni beam. And on top of this fearsome firepower, each metal warrior will be able to punch, jump, speed-run and soar through the danger-laced skies!

FORGING AHEAD IRON MAN has completely new armor exclusive to this game (also featured in the crossover comic book from Marvel and Acclaim).

HEAVY METAL also features full-motion computer animation, similar to the groundbreaking technology featured in the movie, Toy Story, and a hard-driving rock music soundtrack.

The game is going to hit **PlayStation™**, **Saturn™**, **Windows® 95** **Game Boy®** and **Game Gear™** later this summer.

BOTTOM LINE This game may well set a new standard in Super Hero action video games. Until then, you'll just have to be content to know that IRON MAN / X-O MANOWAR: HEAVY METAL will be simply the most thrilling, immersive and technologically astonishing game of the year.

Think you can handle that?

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Theme
Action

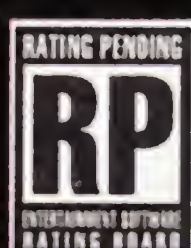
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7th Level puts the finishing touches on a long overdue title that could spell a profitable new take on the future

G-Nome

Format: **Windows 95**

Publisher: **7th Level**

Developer: **7th Level**

Release Date: **July**

Origin: **U.S.**



Each of the different robots has its own special characteristics and strategies. Understanding your machine is one of the keys to victory. The game makes full use of a Windows environment

Players get behind the controls of futuristic vehicles and are challenged by action sequences that fall within the plotline

G

-Nome has had a long history for a game that is still in early development. Originally shown as conceptual video footage at the

Merit booth at the Consumer Electronics Show show in the summer of 1994, *G-Nome* has managed to survive through both Merit's financial hard times and the acquisition of its developer, Distant Thunder, by 7th Level. All of this motion would have killed most projects, but as *G-Nome* nears completion, it seems to be proof of the adage, "that which does not kill me makes me stronger."

G-Nome is an unusual adventure game that takes players through a story. But unlike the point-and-click

atmosphere of *King's Quest* or *Myst*, players get behind the controls of futuristic vehicles and are challenged by action sequences along the plotline.

The team has decided to go with a full Windows 95 environment that *G-Nome's* Producer Todd Porter feels has given the game a solid advantage. "It's a real time, 3D, texture-mapped, polygon game," says Porter. "We're getting benchmarks that are just incredible right now. We're already a Windows-based company, so working with Direct Draw and Direct Access was a no-brainer. We did the Direct Access in October and what we saw was an immediate increase in speed. Another great thing about it is that we can play in any resolution, 320x200 all of the way to 1280x1024."

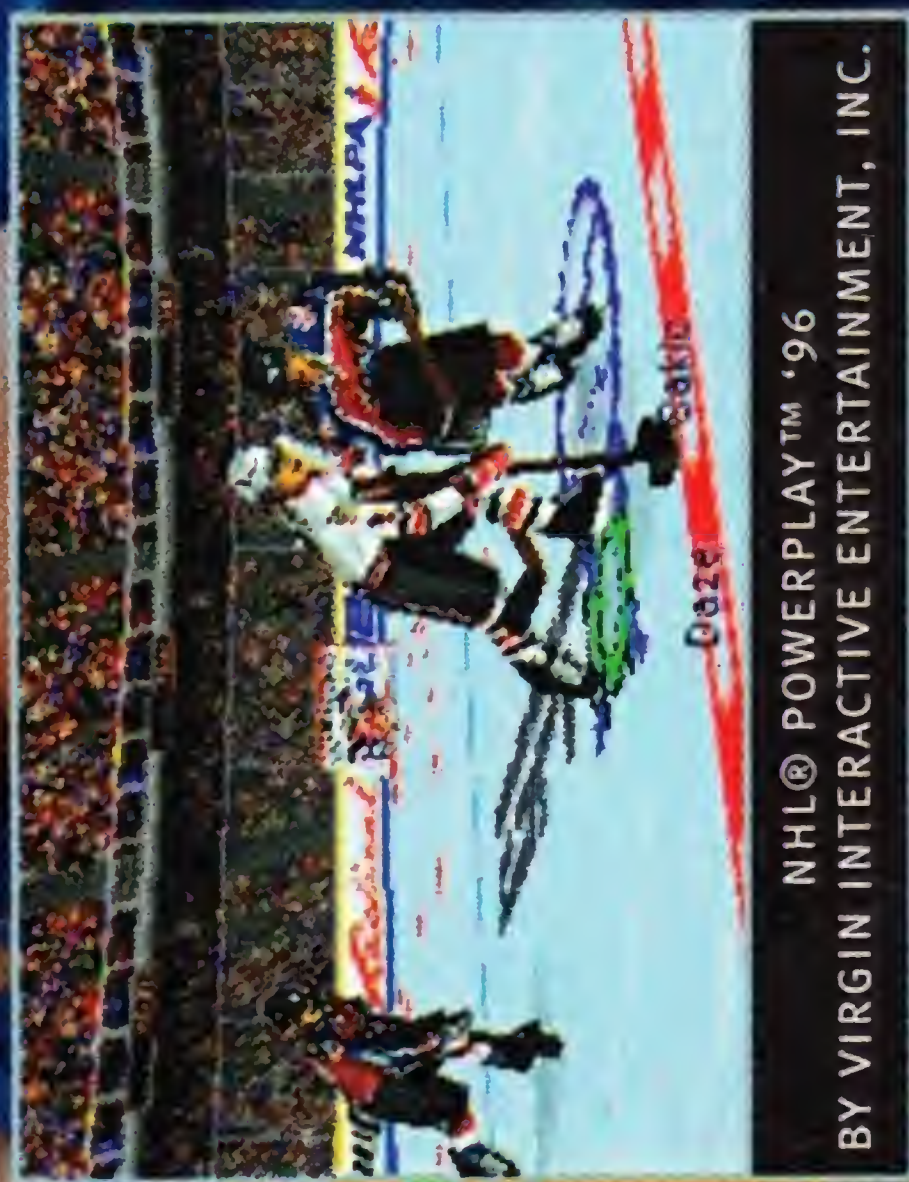
With an upcoming realtime strategy game, *Dominion*, that's based on the same battling robots game world, 7th Level is creating a truly impressive license that it should be able to use for years. Combined with *G-Nome's* 24 gameplay variations, abundant weaponry, and different 'bots to choose from, and you've got a game that may be able to offer adventure fans more absorbing play than they're used to, while at the same time offering action fans a more cranial challenge.

ng

Dominion (right) is a strategy game based on the *G-Nome* universe. Releasing before *G-Nome*, the title is set to give *Command & Conquer* and *Warcraft II* a challenge



Players will need to master 24 gameplay techniques to succeed



{ IN CASE YOU DIDN'T NOTICE, }

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BEAUTIFUL, NAKED WOMAN
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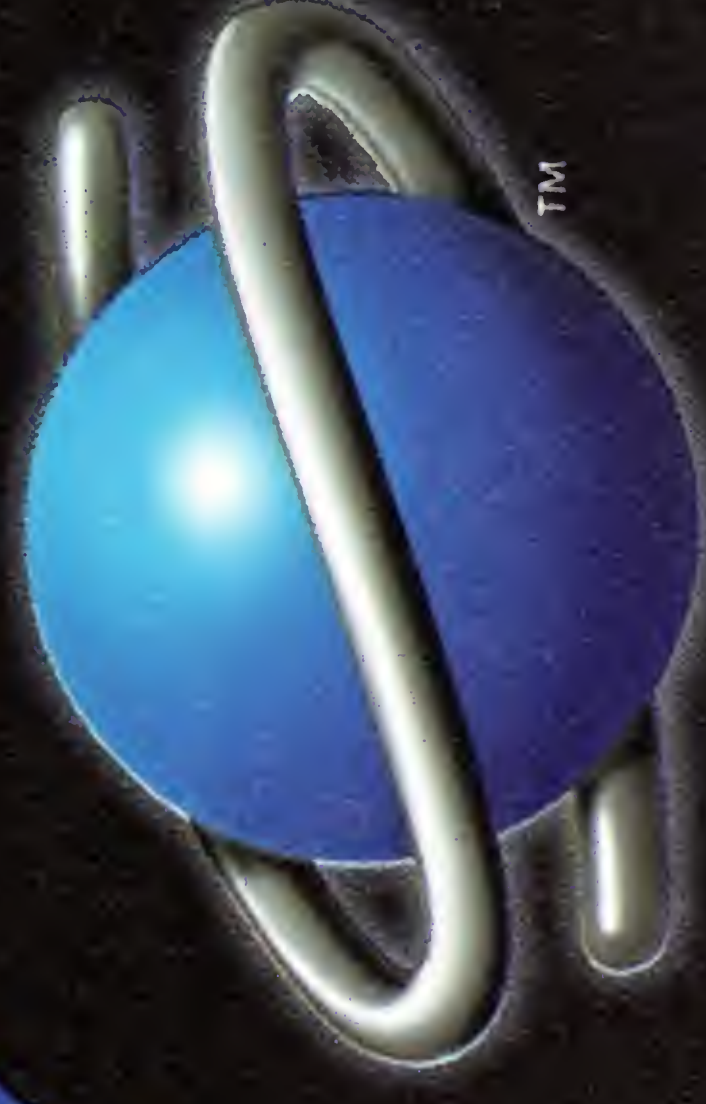


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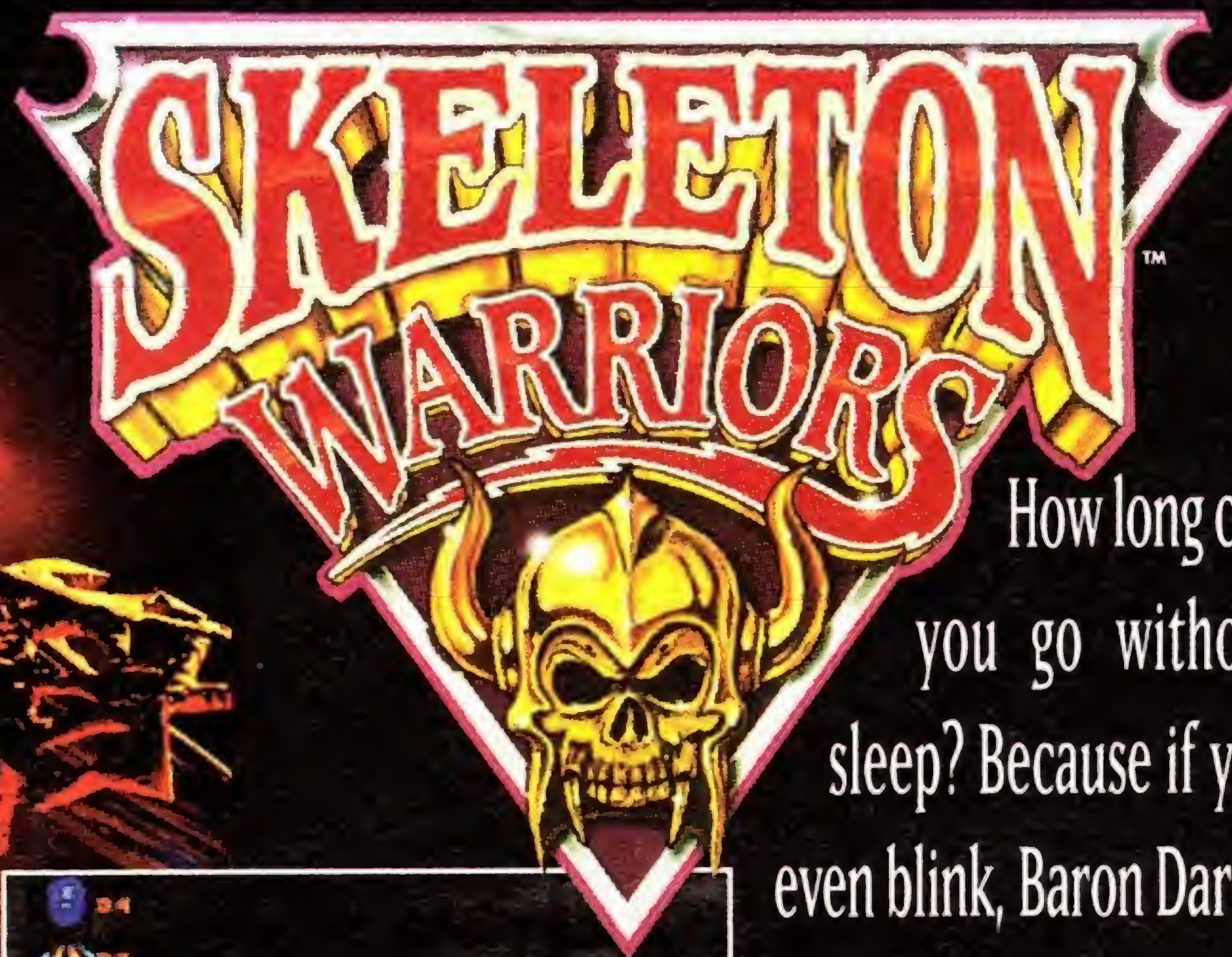
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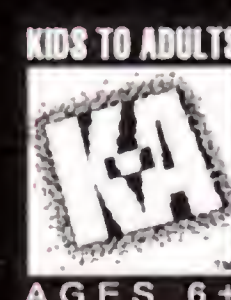
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Last Bronx



One of the few near complete levels, based on the Shibuya crossing in Tokyo. These well-armed street punks aren't messing around

The competitive forces within Sega are now in high gear as AM3 lands a stunning new fighter in AM2 territory



Cop-like billy clubs and short clubs are just a few of the weapons available

Based on Model 2 technology, the core of Last Bronx is a mix of one-on-one Chinese-style fighting and weapon-based combat

Format: **arcade**
 Publisher: **Sega**
 Developer: **Sega AM3**
 Release Date: **July**
 Origin: **Japan**

The Sega AM3 division has proved to be somewhat of a brazen upstart with each and every surprising new title it creates. *Sega Rally*, the phenomenal off-road driving simulation, *Virtual On*, and *Manx TT Super Bike* are all titles developed by AM3. Increasingly, the team is stepping into AM2 territory, especially with its newest and first fighting arcade title. With *Last Bronx*, the team may steal the spotlight from Yu Suzuki's AM2, by giving the Model 2 board its last hurrah.

Based on Model 2 technology, the core of the game is a mix of one-on-one Chinese-style fighting and weapon-based combat. Players can choose which "team" they want to be on at the start; choices include skaters, ladies, *bozosuka* (Hell's Angels), *gurentai* (hoodlums), teamers (those who prefer baggy pants), and others. The players' fighting styles range from Judo to Aikido and weapons range from billy clubs to nunchakus, etc.

Though *Last Bronx* is named after the rough, urban New York setting, most of the fighting scenes take place in various Tokyo hangouts, places known for their street fighting gangs and those places popular with younger, hipper crowds. (In fact, the only known level, the Shibuya, takes place on the Shibuya crossing in front of building 109.)

The blend of martial arts fighting with the use of hand weapons makes this title interesting, especially given the attention to detail and strong gameplay AM3 titles have received in the recent past. And just as *Virtua Fighter* set a tone with clean-cut fighters like Pai, Jacky, and Lau, *Last Bronx* has created its own particular tone. It's filled with long-haired thugs, tattooed punks, and leather-clad bikers, a strain of folk AM3 seems to feel should be better represented in the arcades.



Ah, what a wonderful night for a fling in the local parking garage



Characters' movement is based on motion-capture technology. But while most motion capture uses real people, AM3 used a doll named "Capchan"

ng alphas

Killing Zone



The monsters of *Killing Zone* are able to pull off a number of uniquely special moves, including a special class of immobilizing moves

Format: **PlayStation**

Publisher: **Naxat**

Developer: **Naxat**

Release Date: **June (Japan)**

Origin: **Japan**

In a videogame landscape increasingly flooded with *Virtua Fighter*-inspired 3D brawlers, Naxat of Japan has one title in the works that stands out. It's not the overall structure that makes *Killing Zone* unique — players can choose from among eight characters who fight one-on-one in an arena while the camera sweeps and pans around them; standard fighting game fare. Rather, it's the choice of characters and game mechanics that make it unique: each character is based on a classic monster.

Players can choose from a vampire (the so-called "Dark Faerie"), minotaur, cyclops, gorgon, skeleton, the Frankenstein monster, the mummy, and a single human character, who just happens to be able to transform into a werewolf. While this might seem inviting

Naxat of Japan tries to pull off the first three-dimensional fighting game with teeth — and claws, and spines, and gallons of flowing ichor



Impressive special combos like this head-butt become possible as the characters become stronger and/or faster with each victory

enough on its own, the game also boasts a number of other rather unique features. For instance, as each character wins matches and progresses through the game, he or she is "leveled up,"

As each character wins matches and progresses through the game, he or she grows stronger, faster, or both

becoming either stronger, faster, or both. The exact pattern of bonuses depends on the character chosen, and each character follows its own path, enabling the monsters to mutate into increasingly ferocious forms and do ever more impressive special moves.

While the Death Tournament is what will interest most players, *Killing Zone* also includes an "auto-mode," in which players can choose one of the eight monsters, then choose from a list of 16



The game includes monsters from both mythology and movies



Dark and violent, *Killing Zone* pits classic monsters against one another



The werewolf changes during the course of the game, going from a normal, happy human in camouflage pants to a massive, fur-covered nightmare

Blood will flow, and Naxat is currently planning to include dismemberment during matches

optional body parts that confer additional powers, and set their custom monsters loose in an automated version of the Death Tournament. Players won't be able to control their monster in this mode, but they will be able to see how well a monster performs with the

powers they've chosen for it, and how those powers mutate and change as the monster gains levels (assuming the thing survives), they can then save the results to memory cartridge so it can square off against other monsters created by other players.

Finally, as befits a game populated by blood-thirsty creatures of the night, *Killing Zone* should be strong on the gore factor — Sony's censors willing. Many characters use weapons, even the ones who don't carry an array of claws, fangs, horns, and other nasty equipment. Blood will flow, and Naxat is currently planning to include dismemberment during matches, as combatants lose various parts of their body through enemy action. How this might affect later matches still isn't clear, and this feature may simply be rolled into some kind of finishing move system by the time the game is complete. In any case, *Killing Zone* would still come a close second to Midway's arcade brawler *War Gods* as the first 3D fighting game to include gore, and certainly the first for a home console.



If these rendered-on-the-fly monsters can move as smoothly and swiftly as *Toshinden's* brawlers, *Killing Zone* will certainly be worth waiting for

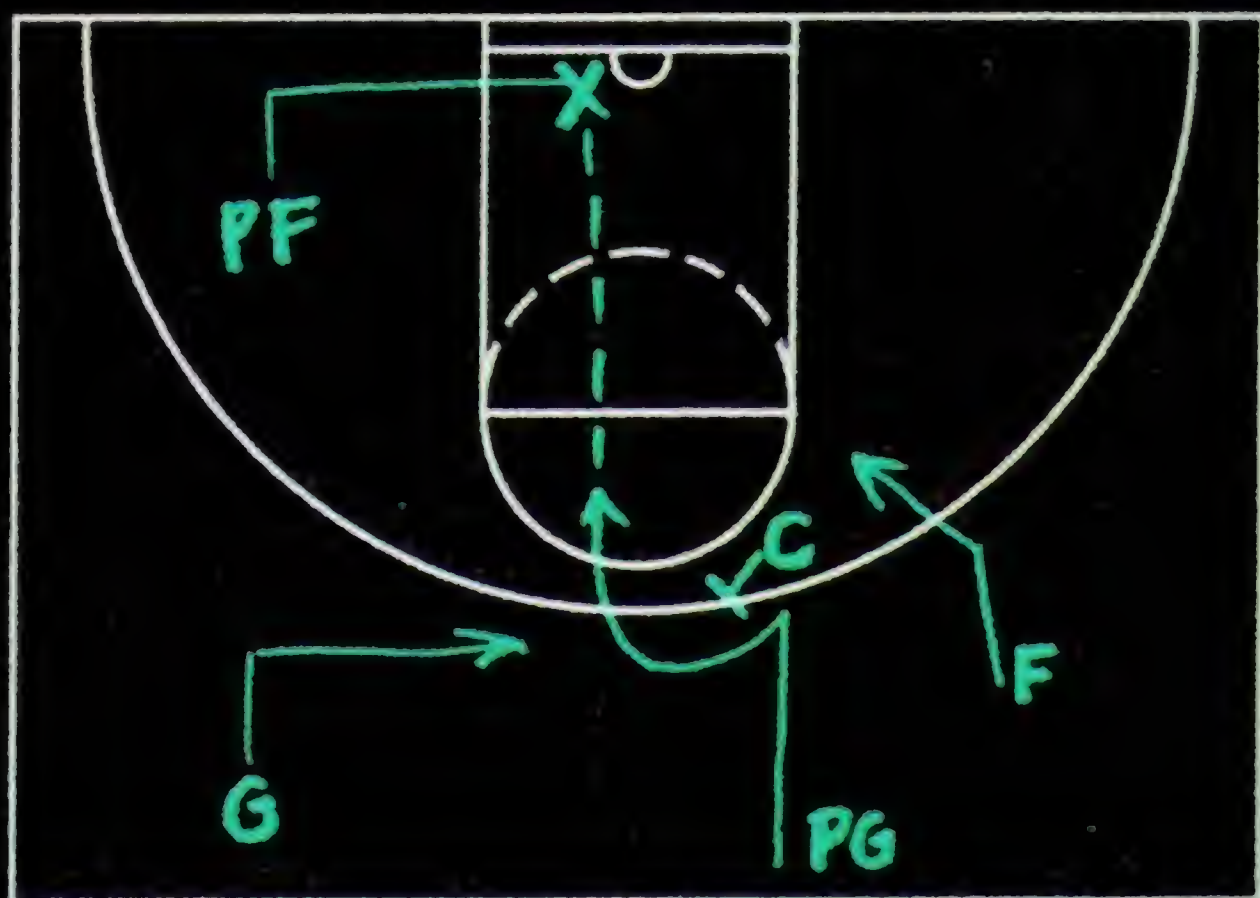


The gorgon attacks the mummy to drain his life essence — although, since the mummy is an undead creature, he or she shouldn't have much left

So far, what Next Generation has seen of the graphics left a little to be desired — the animation was somewhat choppy, and characters would occasionally pass through each other. However, at press time the game was far from complete, and Naxat was working feverishly to bring the graphics and game play up to the level of Namco's *Battle Arena Toshinden*. We wish them luck with this unique and extremely promising brawler.



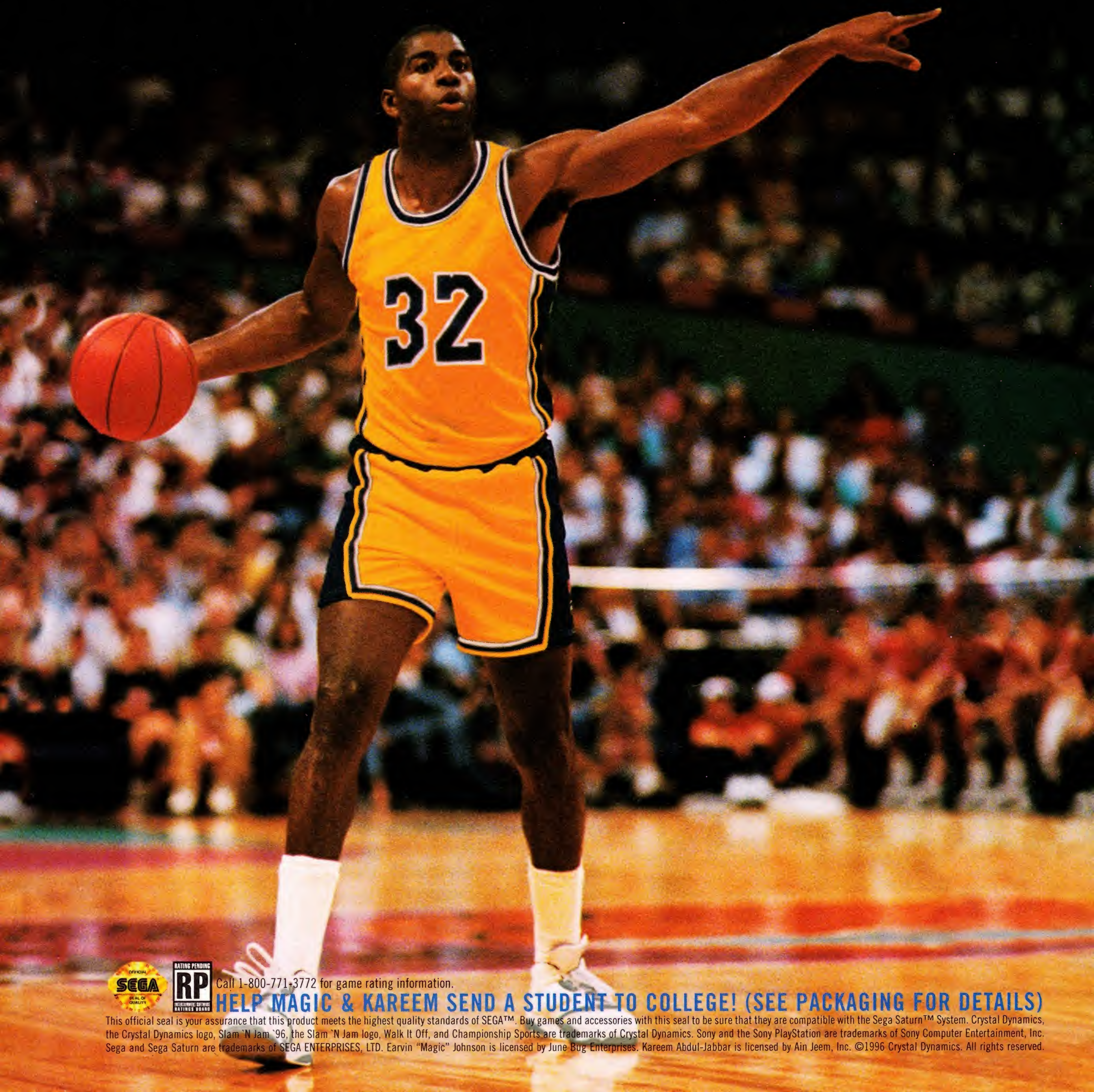
You set the pick for Magic, who rolls to the top of the key. As the defender rotates to cut off the lane, Magic lofts a pass to the wide open power forward for the alley-oop jam.



Sometimes it's the smallest details—Jams off the glass, Defensive thunder swats, Reverse dunks, and Play-by-play commentary, that separate hoops from lawn bowling.



"This fastpaced, first-person basketball sim does a phenomenal job of bringing players into the action."
—NEXT Generation magazine



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Franchise player mode lets you abuse opponents like they were players for an expansion team. Control Magic, Kareem, or Anyone thru a 13, 26, 52, or 82 game season.



7 GAME

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Alien Trilogy PlayStation **Silverload** PlayStation **Iron Storm** Saturn **Worms** Saturn **Cyberia** 3DO **Ripper** PC
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Reviews: the good, the bad, and the ugly

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Welcome back to another installment of **Next Generation's** Finals. Every month we put together a band of experts and ask them what they think about the hottest (and most tired) games available. Here's a handy chart to let you know how we felt about this month's line-up.

★★★★★ **Revolutionary**
 Brilliantly conceived and flawlessly executed; a new high-water mark.

★★★★ **Excellent**
 A high-quality and inventive new game. Either a step forward for an existing genre, or a successful attempt at creating a new one.

★★★ **Good**
 A solid and competitive example of an established game style.

★★ **Average**
 Perhaps competent; certainly uninspired.

★ **Bad**
 Crucially flawed in design or application.

PlayStation



Koei's latest, *Romance IV*, is a lot like its first, with strong deep play

Romance of the Three Kingdoms IV

Publisher: Koei
Developer: Koei

Koei is known for its sprawling and in-depth historical simulations, and *Romance of the Three Kingdoms IV* is the product of years of refinement to one of the most complex game engines ever devised. This is both a blessing and a curse. A blessing because, if you're a fan of this kind of game (and as we've stated before, Koei deserves every fan it has), they don't get much better.

It's a curse, however, for those of us who are fans and who can't help but feel the need for something, well, different. Play any of the *Nobunaga's Ambition* series, then pick up any of the *Romance* games, and you'd be hard pressed to tell them apart.

Next Generation reviewed the Super NES version of this game in August of last year, and the PlayStation version isn't materially different. The graphics are sharper, the soundtrack is a little more lush, and despite complex menus, the game isn't compatible with the PlayStation mouse (while the PC version does). Otherwise gameplay is the same.

There are six historical scenarios to play out, and some 450 officers you can try to recruit, each with their own stats. Each officer also has one or more of the game's 24 "Special Talents," like being especially good at spying or commanding cavalry, although the talent list also includes the ability to affect the weather and even throw lightning (oooh, real historical).

PlayStation

MOTHERLODE



Silverload boasts some of the finest artwork we've seen in a graphic adventure

Silverload

Publisher: Vic Tokai
Developer: Millennium Interactive

Although at **Next Generation** we'd prefer to see games that aren't like anything ever seen before, we're almost as happy to get our hands on a game that, while following a genre's conventions, simply does everything smashing well. *Silverload*, a graphic adventure that blends a horror story with a Western setting, falls into the latter category, putting as strong an emphasis on quality as it does on action and chills.

From the very opening scenes, *Silverload* is one of the best looking graphic adventures to come along in a while for any platform, much less a console like PlayStation. The graphics, a mix of detailed, hand-drawn backgrounds and painted-over digitized actors, give even the relatively "normal" scenes in the game a strange, ethereal glow. The character designs rarely stray from Western stereotypes, but they're well realized, and creepy as hell.

If the game has a flaw, it's the interface, which is icon and "hot-spot" based. The control pad moves the cursor between areas of the screen where you can do something, but reaching certain active areas or getting from the screen to your inventory bar is sometimes a hit-or-miss affair. The game is compatible with the Sony mouse, but unlike the PlayStation version of *X-COM*, it doesn't help.

There's been a number of horror-themed games recently, and while very few have actually instilled any real terror in the player, *Silverload* manages more than a few chills. Because it's a graphic adventure — and a fairly linear one at that — the constant need to go over the same ground again and again while looking for something you missed does dissipate the terror, but the game still generates a creepy enough atmosphere so that when you reach a point where something pops out at you, you jump. Also, for a change, most of the CD-supplied dialogue is actually well written, even if the faux Clint Eastwood voice of the game's hero is kind of cheesy.

Silverload may not do anything new — even the action sequences are the kind of track-based, first-person shooters you've seen before — but it's got challenge, incredible graphics, gore, and chills. It's great stuff.

Rating: ★★★★★

You must have total concentration. You must
become one with your machine. Because if you don't



You will become one with your Machine.



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CLIP AND MAIL

PlayStation



It may not be the first *Doom*-style shooter to feature H.R. Giger's aliens, but *Alien Trilogy* is easily the best

RIPLEY, BELIEVE IT OR NOT...

Alien Trilogy
Publisher: Acclaim
Developer: Probe

Back in the day, Acclaim and Probe released *Alien 3* for Super NES, one of the better side-scrolling, licensed games Acclaim ever published. Now here we are, three years later, and the team of Acclaim and Probe (which is now a wholly-owned development house of Acclaim) have come up with *Alien Trilogy* — and to no surprise, the game is one of the better *Doom*-style, first-person shooters available.

First, you'll need to get by the intro sequence's excellent prerendered 3D animation. Though we've seen it at every trade show for two years, Acclaim's motion-capture work smooths out the transition from intro to game, and is one of the best intros we've seen. You're then dropped straight into the heart of a xenomorph-infested colony of the Weyland-Yutani corporation to blast alien critters (and infected colonists — not sure about the morality of this, but hey), get the various facilities up and running again, and generally make the place safe for mankind.

The game's mechanics are, if anything, overly familiar, and if you've played one first-person shooter you can jump right in. The details, however, are what make this come alive: face huggers scuttle away, full grown aliens drop down from above, alien queens are *not* easy to kill, glass shatters, barrels explode, and, for the most part, the way it controls is so smooth and intuitive that the experience is very close to finding yourself in the middle of the film. Even the music cues kick in at the right moments, and there are times when the game generates real suspense and a genuine moodiness, a rare achievement.

Which doesn't mean it's perfect. Like PlayStation's other *Doom*-style game this month, *PO'ed*, *Alien Trilogy* suffers a little from being overdesigned. Many of the level layouts are mildly confusing, and the map screen is too sketchy on details to be much help. It's possible this was deliberately done to extend the life of the game because compared to, say, *Doom* for PlayStation (or even *PO'ed*), there aren't many stages here.

These are relatively minor problems though. The fact is that the *Alien* movies are just about the perfect scenario for a first-person shooter like this, and the designers have done their job extremely well. The 3D engine is first rate, the action is intense, and the control couldn't be much smoother. Nicely done.

Rating: ★★★★★

The game is amazingly complex and requires varied and long-range strategies, and in order to figure out how all of the commands work, it's guaranteed to steal hundreds of hours of your life. Koei's latest is as good or better than anything it's ever done, it's just not surprising or new. You can slide into this game like a well-worn pair of gloves, but you've seen this before.

Rating: ★★★



Sidewinder may be the best flight game for PlayStation to feature authentic craft, but it's not great

Sidewinder
Publisher: Asmik (Japan)
Developer: Pegasus

When you consider that the only other flight sim-ish games available for PlayStation are the so-so *Air Combat* and the less-than-so-so *Agile Warrior*, it's tempting to give *Sidewinder* more praise than it deserves. Somehow though, that doesn't seem like a good enough reason, especially when compared to *Warhawk*, which wasn't this style of game but flew like a dream.

Still, *Sidewinder* has a lot going for it. The missions are plentiful and varied (the briefings all have voice-overs in Japanese, but the graphic representation makes everything clear enough so you don't need to know what's being said), incorporating a nice mix of air-to-air and air-to-ground assaults. The graphics are impressive with just a little draw-in (the game is structured so you rarely notice it unless you're attacking a large ground target). And the game is challenging without being too frustrating.

The flight engine, however, doesn't respond like a real plane at all. It doesn't even follow arcade style flight characteristics — you can't roll the plane, and you can't even dip the nose unless the wings are nearly level, which means it's difficult to slow a turn, or lower your aim during a turn. After a few missions you get used to it, sort of, but it's counter-intuitive and annoying.

If the game had just controlled better it might have rated a star higher. As it is, it just doesn't suck.

Rating: ★★★

Saturn

Earthworm Jim 2
Publisher: Playmates
Developer: Shiny Entertainment

The popular side-, vertical-, and isometric-scrolling action game from the world of 16 bit has finally made it to 32 bit. *Earthworm Jim 2* was released a few months ago on Genesis and Super NES, and when rumors started flying about a Saturn version of the game, most people willing to speculate hoped for a 3D mutation of this hilarious platformer. What Saturn owners will get is a close translation of the 16-bit game.

The fact of the matter remains that *EJ 2* is a great 2D game, and though it's fashionable to dismiss 2D as yesterday's development constraint, the title is amazingly fun even on a machine designed for 3D gaming.

There are some enhancements over the 16-bit versions of *EJ 2*. Most of the these, however, come by way of an expanded color palette, and an added sense of background depth through the use of extensive parallax scrolling. The solid scrolling gameplay and rollicking humor, on the other hand, has been left very much intact, and outside of playing just a touch smoother, it feels nearly identical to the original.

If you've spent your eagerness over *EJ 2* on a 16-bit console, the Saturn version is not likely to do much for the life of the game. If you've not played this wild and quirky little action title, it's well worth checking out.

Rating: ★★★



Outside of a few graphic upgrades, *Earthworm Jim 2* for Saturn is like the 16-bit versions

Night Warriors: Dark Stalker's Revenge

Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom

In case you didn't know it already, Capcom makes the best 2D fighters in the industry. And despite the advance and growth in popularity of 3D fighters, gamers just can't get enough of Capcom's games. Nonetheless, the downside of Capcom's

rating saturn

Saturn

HOOKED

Worms

Publisher: Ocean

Developer: Team 17

Upon first inspection, the whimsical battle game *Worms* bears a striking resemblance to the famed *Lemmings*. When it comes to playing the game, however, the experience is much closer to *Cannon Fodder* with worms. Beyond the obvious influences, what is also found here is a simple charm that only shows itself in a handful of titles. It's the kind of game that makes no excuses for its lack of texture-mapped polygons or its minimalistic gameplay. *Worms* is a fun game with an infectious spirit and near endless replay value.

The idea is simple. Through the use of various weapons or tools you must eliminate a competing team of worms before they put an end to your efforts. To be successful, it will require equal parts strategy and skill, making this a better-rounded game than most nonworm titles.

What's finally so appealing about *Worms* is the fact that the game is so perfectly designed for head-to-head play. In fact, there is an option that enables up to four players to compete simultaneously for final worm domination. Another spectacular element of gameplay is the spontaneously generated landscapes. Sure, the playing fields are simplistic by today's 32-bit standards, but what other game makes up its environments on the fly? This game is great fun.

Rating: ★★★★★



Setting up intricate war plans in *Worms* is only half the fun. The Uzi is the other half



The spontaneously generated landscapes are just detailed enough to make them challenging



Choosing just the right sub-human character in Capcom's *Night Warriors* is a rewarding trial-and-error process. Hsien-Ko goes in for a little trimming

successful line of 2D fighters, including the *Street Fighter* series, *X-Men*, and the *Dark Stalkers* series, is that the games are all suspiciously similar. What sets *Night Warriors* apart from its cousins, however, is the gothic character design and the consequent moves. While the moves and characters in *Street*

Fighter are at least loosely based on humans and human qualities (please don't write in asking about fireballs), those in *Night Warriors* are a much wilder bunch.

What's fun about *Night Warriors* is the fact that anything can happen. The success of the series lies in the fact that each character has a host of twisted

maneuvers that take the action to all sorts of extremes, and yet that wonderful chess-like strategy element is still perfectly applicable to the game.

Strategy aside, what *Night Warriors* does share with other Capcom fighters is the same crisp and responsive control that makes players appreciate the impeccable animation more than ever.

Rating: ★★★

Shining Wisdom

Publisher: Working Designs

Developer: Sonic! Software

Through the deluge of games released for the 32-bit systems, the always-popular RPG genre has remained somewhat neglected. As one of the first RPGs for the next-generation systems, Working Designs' *Shining Wisdom* sadly falls short of 32-bit graphic and gameplaying expectations.

The problem with *Shining Wisdom* is that its graphics and gameplay seem more like an evolution rather than a revolution in the game form from the 16-bit platforms. Graphics are sharper on Saturn, but for the most part what gamers get are the same old "superdeformed" guys running around fighting monsters and

picking up items. Other than the rich soundtrack, there is no attempt to use any of the available 32-bit power.

But *Shining Wisdom* isn't a total loss. In fact, if it were a 16-bit title, it would compare quite favorably to most RPGs. The game features a long, involved storyline, a variety of lands to explore, and high play value. For the most part, traditional RPG fans will find *Shining Wisdom* a satisfying game experience. It's not groundbreaking by any means, but it will do until the 32-bit RPG revolution really begins.

Rating: ★★★



Though competent, *Shining Wisdom* suffers from its old-school graphics and gameplay

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rating 3DO pc

Saturn

STORMIN'



From its stunning intro sequences to the exceptional game AI and replay value, *Iron Storm* sets new benchmarks for the flying simulation genre

Iron Storm**Publisher:** Working Designs**Developer:** Sega of Japan

In a genre that traditionally boasts a small cult-like following at best, *Iron Storm* expands the appeal of the simulation game with realtime, 3D polygon rendering that provides the gamer with a visceral payoff for each strategic input. The sight of a squadron of Stukas decimating a tank column certainly adds life to what is often perceived as a "dry" genre. After a few perfunctory viewings, however, a sad reality settles in and the graphics become merely annoying as gameplay slows to a crawl in order to accommodate them.

Fortunately, these animated scenes can be turned off without affecting gameplay. Judged strictly as a hexagon grid-based strategy war game, *Iron Storm* proves to be addicting and challenging forgoing the extreme complexity of, for example, *PTO II* from Koei, replacing it with a more straightforward battlefield strategy. With more than 500 selectable weapons (practically all that were available in WWII), 50 historic battles in both the Pacific and European theaters of operation — and the choice of controlling U.S., Japanese, or German forces — *Iron Storm* ranks with the best of its strategy companions.

Rating: ★★★★★

3DO

Cyberdillo**Publisher:** Panasonic**Developer:** Pixel Technologies

Copying *Doom* has been the fashionable trend over the last couple of years, but *Cyberdillo* takes a new angle on the *Doom*-clone with a *Doom*-spoof. Players roam through a set of pixelly hallways and several weird levels as an armadillo packing a plunger

gun. Starting in the infamous "Disco Land" and going on to a place where walking hot dogs are the norm may sound interesting to some, but in reality *Cyberdillo* just doesn't cut it.

Plunging your way through each ridiculously bright (to the point of blindness) level, you are faced with trying to find a way out of the maze while taking out odd enemies like lava lamps and hair spray cans. *Cyberdillo* isn't about saving the world or even fixing backed up toilets, it's simply: find



Cyberdillo's trippy hallways and bad disco are good for flashbacks, but the gameplay isn't there

four unusual items and get out.

Predictably, there are the usual bosses like Barfman, TV Man, Melon Fish, and Dumpmeister (OK, maybe they're not so usual), who you'll need to crush to get to the end.

Although *Cyberdillo* moves surprisingly fast on 3DO, the control is very loose and the graphics are far from cutting edge. The developers deserve credit for trying to make something that's different, but in the end, *Cyberdillo* is either a cute novelty or a run-of-the-mill *Doom* game — neither of which make for much long-term entertainment.

Rating: ★★

Cyberia's hall-wandering scenes look awesome, but a restrictive choice of paths limits gameplay

Cyberia**Publisher:** Interplay**Developer:** Xatrix Entertainment

The well-traveled *Cyberia* makes a stop on its fourth videogame platform (PC, PlayStation, Saturn, and now 3DO) and delivers a product that is exactly like the other three versions. While that's not such good news for those who have already played the game, 3DO owners who haven't played this one are in for a nice surprise.

Graphically, the game is superb. The slick, rendered graphics in the intro sequences, which normally leave the player feeling slighted when the game actually starts, are now finally available in the "gameplay." And the game's use of multiple camera angles, an eerie soundtrack, detailed light-sourcing, and short, effective cut-scenes actually make the player feel as if he or she is controlling the camera in a science-fiction movie.

Unfortunately, along with that motion picture feeling comes the reality of having to follow a script. The linear gameplay doesn't permit wandering or adventuring. The entire game is on a track that constantly pulls you back to what you're supposed to be doing. Even the arcade-style shooting sequences have the ship on a track, although they're still quite enjoyable. And like any graphic adventure, the gameplay here is based on repetitious and annoying trial-and-error methods.

Creating your own story is the ideal graphic adventure and *Cyberia* doesn't come any closer to that lofty goal, but the game pushes the established limits of the genre to their max. It's worth taking a look at.

Rating: ★★★

PC



Allied General is a good update but not satisfying as a sequel

Allied General**Publisher:** Mindscape**Developer:** SSI

Panzer General was one of the best-loved war games of last year, and *Allied General* is an improvement on an already great engine. For a sequel to such a prestigious title, however, there's really not much new here.

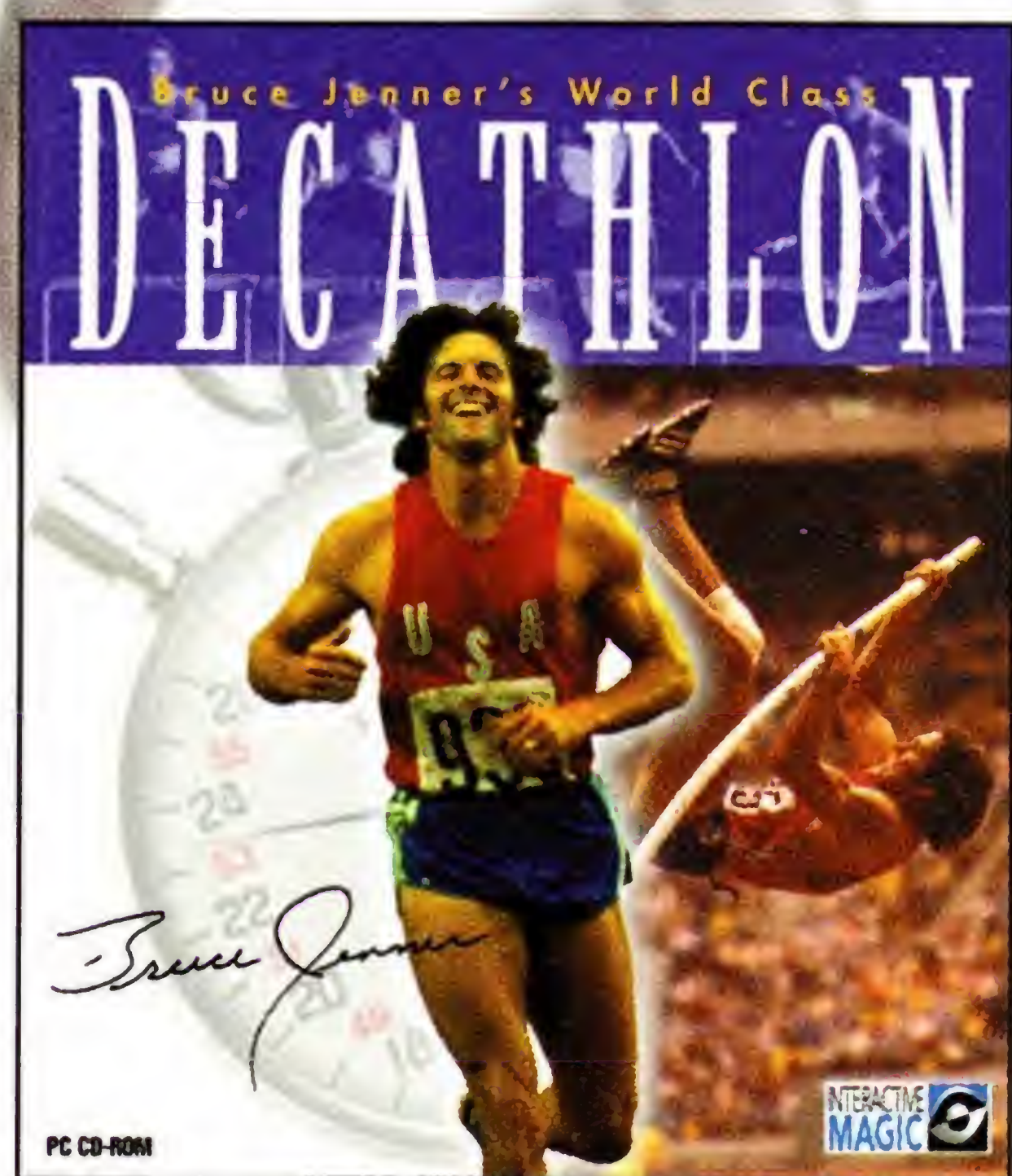
This time, the game runs solely under Windows (3.1 and 95). As a result, you can do Windows-like things with it: have several different windows open, change resolutions (up to 1024x768) and hide it in the background when the boss walks by. There's improved e-mail play, with playback of your opponent's moves, and three campaigns where you lead the same group of units from battle to battle, as well as 35 varying scenarios, including a couple of fictitious ones.

On the other hand, the AI still isn't sharp, and expect to see some cheating on the computer's part. It's still a solid war game, and although we will have to wait for *Panzer General II* for the real improvements, this should be enough to tide any war-gamer over, at least for now.

Rating: ★★★★★

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PC

JACK'S BACK

Ripper

Publisher: Take 2 Interactive

Developer: Take 2 Interactive

Ripper is one of those games that can't seem to make up its mind. One minute the game believes it's a graphic adventure, the next it's a movie, and the next it's a puzzle game. If any one of these aspects would be perfected, it could be a gamer's delight. As it stands, the game is mediocre in each category.

In the year 2040 a series of mysterious, gruesome murders have taken place. The player assumes the persona of Jake Quinlan, an investigative reporter for the *Virtual Herald*. The killer has a tendency to send Jake messages after the murders, and when Jake's love interest is put into a coma by the self-styled Ripper, he starts hunting the killer.

From *11th Hour*-style sliding tile interactions, to action sequences in which the speed with which you move your mouse will determine whether or not you'll access important information, the game is full of puzzles. As an interactive movie, it has some big-name stars, from Christopher Walken (*Pulp Fiction*, *Deer Hunter*) to T.V.'s Jimmy Walker ("Good Times"), but the roles they play are so overdone it's just plain funny.

The 3D rendered backgrounds are impressive, but moving through them can be about as quick as a snail on depressants. There's no way to bypass the several first-person movement scenes, so when you go back to retrace your footsteps, you'll see the same thing over and over.

When all is said and done, *Ripper* has the potential to be a great game, but it simply doesn't live up to expectations. And that's the disappointing part, considering the game has a great story and beautiful graphics.

Rating: ★★★



Some people just don't like to be covered with their own blood. This is the kind of hysteria that drives the storyline (top). Between puzzle challenges, you'll get *The Hive*-like action scenes (inset)



This guy is the computer hack — you can tell by his furniture



It's slow, it's clunky, and it's not a whole lot of fun. This is about all there is to *CyberSpeed*

CyberSpeed

Publisher: Mindscape, Inc.

Developer: Mindscape, Inc.

If you want a game that requires a mainframe computer to run smoothly, has about as much control as a 747 with no steering yoke, and looks as good as Rosanne in a bikini, this is it.

This is supposed to be racing in the future, but it's more like the future of torture. The ships you fly are connected to a laser tether that runs around a track, and the only skill involved in racing is trying to figure out when to spin your ship around in circles, and when to hit the turbo button. The game is so unchallenging that if you let your pet dog Stinky at the controller, it may have a good chance of beating you.

As for system requirements, if you have anything less than a Pentium 90, abandon all hope, ye

who purchase here. The graphics are drab, and, with only a few exceptions, the tracks are uninspired. The only winning grace is the mock commercials that run between races, and those are more ridiculous than funny. If you want a racing sim, check out *Whiplash* and avoid *CyberSpeed* like, well, Rosanne in a bikini.

Rating: ★

Descent II

Publisher: Interplay

Developer: Parallax Software

When it comes to sequels, few can boast the improvements like those made on *Descent II*. This one takes all the action and excitement of *Descent*, puts it in high-resolution graphics (up to 800x600), throws in some FMV footage to tie it all together in a coherent plot that doesn't



Descent II is full of the killer gameplay, weapons, and enemies that made the first so damn good

interfere with the gameplay, and finishes it off with a bunch of new weapons, items, and enemies.

The storyline follows up on the first title — the mercenary you control is sent on yet another errand for the mega-mining corporation PTMC. Your job is to make use of the hot new weapons to battle the ugly new enemies. Some of the new items include the blinding flash missile, the smart missile (a guided missile that you're able to control), and even a guide-bot that will lead you to the next goal.

There's even a new missile view, enabling you to see where it's headed in a small window. The high-res graphics are light-years ahead of its predecessor, and if you play on a Pentium, the game flow is silky smooth, even with the highest detail.

The game is still not perfect. Control can be a bit shaky at times, and there are plenty of pauses when the game loads the next track of redbook audio off the CD. You can shut the CD music off, though it still sounds much better with it on. And, realistically, the game still has the same motif — find the key, open the door, blow up the reactor, get out. Considering the improvements, however, that's perfectly all right.

Rating: ★★★★★



The 800x600 3D mode may not be the smoothest in *Hyper 3-D Pinball*, but it sure is pretty

Hyper 3-D Pinball

Publisher: Virgin Interactive

Developer: NMS Software

With the multitudes of pinball sims flooding the market, it's hard to find one that stands above the crowd. This game, however, shines through like a stick of dynamite in a burning barn.

Hyper 3-D Pinball delivers fast and furious action from a pixelated 320x200 mode to a stunning 800x600. There are a few different angles to look at the table, too: 2D and 3D panning views that only show a portion at a time, and a full 3D view that enables you to see all of the action. All of these include fantastic photorealistic graphics and, with seven tables, the game provides a variety of challenges to keep any pinball wizard happy.

The only real elements that

"Hey Dad, what video games
did you play in the olden days?"



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PC

DÉJÀ VU



The good guy and the bad guy. Now, can you guess who is who?

Wing Commander IV: The Price of Freedom

Publisher: Origin Systems

Developer: Origin Systems

If you loved *Wing Commander III*, you'll love this new version. Because that's what this is, a new version of an old title.

Of course, this version had a bigger budget; \$10 million to be exact. The special effects are spectacular, the acting superb, and the story gripping. But as a game, the kind you play, it's the exact same thing as *WC III*.

That's not a bad thing — *WC III* was a great game, and it's nice to get more of the same. But with \$10 million, you'd think the programmers could have optimized the code. They could have added tons of features: replays, multiplayer support, more ships, or even more interactivity.

Players can still choose between two options during movie scenes (the nice-guy response, and the jerk response); and the actual gameplay, which runs on exactly the same engine as *WC III* (with only a few improvements), runs almost half as fast at even the lowest resolution — with all the details turned off.

Still, if you have the machine to run it, there's a lot of fun to be had here. The missions are varied, from the usual seek-and-destroy flights to reconnaissance, hostage rescues, and even spy insertions. There are several different endings depending on which choices you make throughout the game, enabling more replay value than the earlier game. Additionally, while the movies may be tiresome, they are vastly improved, with 16-bit video and stereo surround-sound making it an impressive experience. It's just too bad more time was spent on the noninteractive portion instead of the game itself.

Rating: ★★★★★



Not much has changed about the combat engine, except that there's no cockpit view anymore, and it's about half as fast

keep this title from being nirvana are those that are missing: control of tilt sensitivity, number of balls, and table angles. Although the three views are nice, a full-screen 2D mode would also have been welcome, too.

Rating: ★★★★★

Rayman

Publisher: Ubi Soft

Developer: Ubi Soft

If there's one thing the home PC market lacks, it's good platform action titles like those found on console systems. *Rayman* is a good example of a console game that has made a wonderful appearance on the PC.

The graphics, while cartoonish, are fun to watch and make the play enticing. The speed of the game on a 486 with 8 megabytes of RAM seems to be exactly the same as a Pentium with 16 MBs. Sure, the theme is corny, and it's a game that seems to be created mostly with console players (usually young boys) in mind, but considering some of the other options for platform games on the PC (*Thexder*, *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure*), it's a welcome change of pace.

There are plenty of power-ups, simple puzzles, a multitude of challenges, and Rayman himself, who is charming in his own way. You might get the same gaming experience on a 16-bit system, but it's nice to know that you can load up a simplistic game on your PC every now and then, too. For mindless, harmless action on a PC, *Rayman* definitely delivers.

Rating: ★★★★★



Rayman's charming, cartoonish look and solid but simple gameplay are welcome on the PC

Space Bucks

Publisher: Sierra

Developer: Sierra

With the exception of *Gazillionaire*, there are no real good space-based trading sims on the market. Counting *Space Bucks*, well, there's still nothing.

Players begin the game after man re-discovers space travel that's faster than light. Traveling to a nearby planet, players open a bid for landing rights, and hope they don't get out-bid by a competitor. If so, bids can be made once more, but that's it. Once you've got landing rights to

a planet, you can start sending your cargo ships to it. At about that point, the only choice that can be made is to determine what cargo your ships are going to carry. Then you find another planet to put a bid on, and repeat the process again.

That's about all there is to this game. No cut-throat strategy for undermining the competition's prices, no sabotage of trading routes, no space battles — not even the occasional price war.

There are much better trading sims that don't take place in space, such as *Transport Tycoon* or *Capitalism*. If you're yearning for a science fiction trading sim, play *High Seas Trader* while watching the *Star Wars* trilogy.

Rating: ★

Top Gun

Publisher: Spectrum Holobyte

Developer: Spectrum Holobyte

The box reads: "You saw the movie. Now play it." For the record, the game doesn't entertain like the movie, and it doesn't fly like a F-14 Hornet. *Top Gun* is a lacking flight sim with



Top Gun isn't a true-life sim, but it's got some decent missions

lacking video clips holding together a lame plot.

The graphics don't come close to other flight sims. Although the high-res cockpit, planes, and views are attractive, the ground is uniformly blocky, with virtually no definition. There's a cool virtual cockpit view that enables you to look around, but the instrument panel is an unusable piece of art, so to track the important information, you have to use the standard cockpit view.

At least the missions are varied. Following the movie's plot a bit, you play Maverick. Along with your wingman you fly missions at Top Gun flight school, engaging in mock dogfights with the other students to determine the best of the best. From there you move on to more serious campaigns all over the world.

The best feature going for this near-loser is its accommodating network options. It's simple and easy to fly, and you can get eight of your buddies in the air at once. As competent as the multiplayer

rating super nes arcade

aspect is, though, it doesn't make *Top Gun* a "top game," or enough of a winner to stand out above other, better flight sims.

Rating: ★★

Whiplash

Publisher: Interplay

Developer: Gremlin Interactive

As racing simulations go, *Whiplash* isn't the one to get if you're looking for serious realism and simulation depth. If, however, arcade fun and invention is more your style, you'll like this game.

There are several tracks that contain a variety of challenges, from the Tsunami Twister (a jump that flips your car in a barrel-roll — just like James Bond's in *Live and Let Die*), to a corkscrew that's insanely difficult to navigate successfully. There are lots of different cars to drive, and, if you play the championship mode, the last race is replayable, and can be captured, spliced, and



There are several viewing angles in *Whiplash*, but the best for control is behind the wheel

saved for posterity or for the more important bragging rights.

The biggest drawback is the high-res mode. Even on a Pentium 133, it's slow with all the details on. In fact, even with details off the frame rate isn't spectacular.

With good network options and very entertaining arcade style tracks, it's got a definite edge over similar titles like *The Need for Speed* or *Screamer*.

Rating: ★★★★★

Arcade

Funky Head Boxers

Publisher: Sega

Developer: Sega

Whether or not Sega's developers couldn't squeeze enough out of the ST-V Titan system to create round digitized heads, or whether they purposely set out to create big, boxy, digitized heads, they're not saying. But *Funky Head Boxers* is an unusual boxing game that packs a few good chuckles.

The game is really like waking up in a "Twilight Zone" episode, except instead of turning out a mutant on a martian planet, you,

Super NES

PLUMBING DEPTH

Mario RPG

Publisher: Nintendo

Developer: Square Soft

As the world anxiously awaits *Mario 64* for the elusive N64, Nintendo has entrusted its precious mascot, Mario, to RPG masters and long-time Nintendo supporters, Square Soft. The result is *Mario RPG*, a traditional Square Soft RPG with nontraditional tendencies. As luck would have it, the elements that stand out from the traditional formula are those that make this a recognizable Mario game. What fun would a Mario game be, after all, without some hint of running, jumping, and wacky humor? To get a good idea for the gameplay of *Mario RPG* just imagine a title that's about 25% traditional Mario action game combined with 75% RPG, and held together by the strength of its characters and well-developed world.

As was expected from the quality-driven companies involved in creating *Mario RPG*, the game is chock full of beautifully rendered graphics, top-notch sound effects, and plenty of genuinely funny *Mario* humor. The game also employs some clever little twists and challenging puzzles as the enormous world of Mario is slowly revealed throughout the game. What's perhaps most important about the game, however, is the alluring nature of the characters and the bizarre storyline as it continues to develop with new characters and plot twists.

Successfully blending action elements with a reasonably complex storyline and battle strategies, *Mario RPG* is the perfect introduction to the world of RPGs. While it would be impossible to successfully argue that *Mario RPG* maintains the complexity of most RPGs, it is deep enough to command the concentration of even the most seasoned RPG fan. On the other hand, it's not so difficult as to alienate non-RPG fans. Thanks to the consideration given to both genres (a rare feat), *Mario RPG* is truly an attractive title for most gamers.

Rating: ★★★★★



Using both traditional role-playing elements as well as *Mario* action-style gameplay, Nintendo's new *Mario RPG* has something in it for everyone



Rock 'em Sock 'em Robots just got a new lease on life in the odd boxing game *Funky Head Boxers*

and everyone around you — your opponents, the ref, the entire audience — has overly large craniums shaped like blocks of Tillamook cheese. A one-player game, *Funky* enables you to perform standard boxing moves — jabs, uppercuts, roundhouses, hooks — as well as supernatural ones, like helicopter spins, flying double-fisted combos, or megaton hooks, which are entertaining

when they land. You fight six somewhat balanced opponents and then battle the heavyweight champ for the title; players can win or lose automatically after three knockdowns, or after a really sound beating. Each no-name boxer head is digitized, and the boxers weave and sway back and forth, especially when they're going down. Toggle the joystick and press buttons to raise your health meter after a knockout and you recover, but beware, the action is slow, and boxers don't always react on-time with your commands. Also, after the second knockdown, you're more susceptible to getting the living daylight beaten out of you.

Maybe the best quality about this title is the range of expressions on the fighters when they're hit. When a swing is blocked, a fighter will grind his teeth; when hit smart and hard, his eyes will bulge, he'll pucker

his cheeks out, and tears or stars will appear on his eyes. Having said that, *Funky Head Boxers* is one bizarre title. It's a decent game but not impressive, especially for what's hyped as a hot, new arcade system.

Rating: ★★

NBA Hangtime

Publisher: Williams

Bally/Midway

Developer: Williams

Bally/Midway

Well, whatever happened to Midway's license with *NBA Jam*, it didn't seem to have any affect on the look, feel, or play of its new basketball title at all. *NBA Hangtime* has all the playable qualities of *NBA Jam*, plus a slew of perks that make this worthy of your arcade quarters.

The overall "new" game is studded with little extras built around the *NBA Jam* core game. Double dunks, a trivia quiz in

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Arcade



Two dimensions, but still the best around. The mighty 16-year-old favorite Sakura sends a mushroom burst at return character Dan

2D OR NOT 2D?

Street Fighter Alpha II

Publisher: Capcom

Developer: Capcom

The Longest Ongoing Arcade Series Award goes, without a doubt, to Capcom. Because now there are nine, count them, nine *Street Fighter* titles to have hit the arcade floors without the company ever reaching that taboo number, three.

While at first glance this *Street Fighter Alpha II* looks just like *Street Fighter Alpha*, it's different. But you have to go out of your way to find the biggest change, the Custom Combo, an unprecedented, new, and complex innovation in *Street Fighter* gameplay. It works like this: Once you've attained enough power on the Power Meter, hit any three buttons by forming a triangle, and you'll be able to "program" a personal combination. You can set it from one to three seconds, and depending on the speed of your character, a lot of moves can be built in. Weirdly, the programming is a first-in-first-out method, in which once activated, you execute your moves and they are performed in hyper-fast speed one after another while you're executing the next moves. You're vulnerable while "programming," too, and it's important to get in the first hit because just like a Super Combo, you'll have your energy sapped if you're hit first.

In addition to this feature are three new characters, Gen, Sakura, and Rolento, totaling a wholesome 18 characters for the game, the most of any *SF* title yet (*Super Street Fighter 2* takes second place with 12 playable characters, four bosses). Gen, an old master created in the likeness of *Virtua Fighter 2*'s Shun-Di, is able to switch fighting styles (Mantis to Crane) in the middle of fighting; Sakura, who may be one of the coolest and most popular characters, is a young school girl dressed in high socks and short skirt; and Rolento, a military fanatic, who's armed with nunchakus and is capable of hurling knives.

Besides a fresh set of backgrounds — including one back-alley scene in which your characters step in puddles that splash about their legs, and where simple but effective shadows are produced — the only other new feature is that you're already set in Turbo mode, enabling slightly quicker moves, jumps, and overall movement.

Of course, all of the standard Capcom qualities are present: smooth moving, crisp animation, wonderful character design, overall good use of the CPS 2 Board, which has really been maximized by the developers, and the kick-ass *Street Fighter* game itself, underlying everything. Although it's just another 2D fighter for those who aren't paying attention, this is a fine new addition for true hard-core gamers.

Rating: ★★★



Enhanced speed and createable players make *Hangtime* a winner

between games, and power-ups are some of the cool fringe extras, but they're not the central ones. The pride of this new title is in its extensive Create a Player Mode.

With choices ranging from attributes (height, weight, speed, etc.), uniforms, names, stats, nicknames (Bubba, T-Rex), heads (including alien and cow heads), and privileges, you've got a lot of choosing to do before you actually play, but there is ostensibly more control of your player. Privileges include breaking the backboard, stealth turbo, big heads, super rebounds, and a mystery back door privilege. These choices make *Hangtime* more like a console game, and though you need an extra quarter to create this player, it'll be permanently recorded on that machine.

If you like your basketball simple and straight, you can skip all the new stuff and play the game itself. And if you're a serious gamer, you'll be able to create a player whose power increases throughout the game (when you win, of course). The gameplay is as good as ever, albeit the same as *NBA Jam*. It's just that the trouble with sports titles is that once they've made a good one, they're built upon, rather than begun again from scratch. This is a good upgrade with lots of extras.

Rating: ★★★

19XX

Publisher: Capcom

Developer: Capcom

Before the age of the 3D shooter arrives (if ever), companies like Fabtek, Data East, and Capcom will work in as many 2D features to the never-say-die shooter as they're capable of.

Witness *19XX*, Capcom's new overhead shooter. Its clean looking animation, multilevel backgrounds, digitized explosions and various streams of patterned enemies place *19XX* among the cream of the crop. And player control is faster and more responsive than, say, *Raiden II*.

We'll be honest, however, and say that there's very little a developer can do to alter the shooter without changing the formula altogether, but there is something that sets this one

apart from the litany of carpal-threatening twitchies.

The strategy here is to learn how to control the various built-in weapons that each aircraft (Lightning, a well-rounded fighter; Shinden, a speedy fighter; and Mosquito, slower but maxxed out in fire power) has been gifted — not to depend entirely on power-ups. Shoot and hold down the Marker Missile (the shooting button), and you'll release machine gun fire. Within seconds, a fat missile is released, followed by loads of arching, heat-seeking homing shots. Push the Bomb button and the defensive flash shell eliminates enemy fire power;



Street Fighter moves are built into Capcom's new shooter *19XX*

keep it down and the bomb will charge into a screen-clearing warhead. The longer you hold after release, the more powerful the charge (most effective when you're on your last bomb and you're close to beating a boss).

Essentially, Capcom provides you with more variations in the ways you attack the bad guys. It's kinda like using *Street Fighter*'s combo meter, but in a shooter. It's a breath of fresh air, a slight break in the shooter routine that really sets this one apart.

Rating: ★★★

SORRY!

No new games were made available for review this month on the following systems

Virtual Boy

Neo-Geo

Macintosh

Genesis

No Pain, No Game!



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32-bit gamer's guide

Every new 32-bit game rated by Next Generation's reviewers

The following list of review scores is designed to help you, the game player, make smarter buying decisions.

Everyone knows that you can't judge a book by its cover, and it's becoming increasingly obvious that you can't judge a game by its packaging. Each title listed here has been extensively playtested by a **Next Generation** staff member — you can trust the rating.

Please note, however, that many of the games here are more than nine months old, and many of them have been superseded by sequels (Sega's *Virtua Fighter*, *Virtua Fighter Remix* and *Virtua Fighter 2*, for example). In this event, we advise you to pick the newest title, even if the older game has a good review score. Also note that if a title has the suffix (Japan), it is currently only available as an imported title and won't work with standard US equipment.

TITLE	PUBLISHER	NG RATING
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PlayStation

<i>Agile Warrior</i>	Virgin	★★
<i>Alien Trilogy</i>	Acclaim	★★★★
<i>A-Train</i>	SCE	★★★
<i>Aquanaut's Holiday (Japan)</i>	ArtDink	★★★★
<i>Arc The Lad (Japan)</i>	SCE	★★★★
<i>Battle Arena Toshinden</i>	SCE	★★★★
<i>Battle Arena Toshinden 2</i>	SCE	★★★★
<i>Boxer's Road (Japan)</i>	New Corp	★★★
<i>Cosmic Race (Japan)</i>	Neorex	★
<i>Crime Crackers (Japan)</i>	Sony Entertainment	★★
<i>Criticom</i>	Vic Tokai	★★
<i>Cyberia</i>	Interplay	★★★
<i>Cyberspeed</i>	Mindscape	★★★
<i>Cyber Sled</i>	Namco	★★
<i>Cyber War (Japan)</i>	Coco Nuts	★★
<i>Defcom 5</i>	Data East	★★★★
<i>Dark Stalkers</i>	Capcom	★★★
<i>Descent</i>	Interplay	★★★★
<i>Destruction Derby</i>	Psygnosis	★★★★
<i>Doom</i>	Williams	★★★★
<i>Dragon Ball Z (Japan)</i>	Bandai	★★
<i>Gex</i>	Crystal Dynamics	★★★
<i>Goal Storm</i>	Konami	★★★★
<i>Gunner's Heaven (Japan)</i>	Media Vision	★★★★
<i>In the Hunt</i>	Xing	★
<i>In the Zone</i>	Konami	★★★
<i>Jumping Flash!</i>	SCE	★★★★★

TITLE	PUBLISHER	NG RATING	TITLE	PUBLISHER	NG RATING
<i>Jupiter Strike</i>	Acclaim	★	<i>Cyberspeed</i>	Mindscape	★★★
<i>Kileak The DNA Imperative</i>	SME	★★★	<i>D</i>	Acclaim	★★★
<i>Kileak The Blood 2</i>	SME	★★	<i>Dark Legends (Japan)</i>	Data East	★★
<i>King's Field</i>	Asciware	★★★★	<i>Daytona USA</i>	Sega	★★★★
<i>Krazy Ivan</i>	Psygnosis	★★★	<i>Deadalus (Japan)</i>	Sega	★★★
<i>Loaded</i>	Interplay	★★★★	<i>Double Switch</i>	Digital Pictures	★★
<i>Metal Jacket (Japan)</i>	Solan	★	<i>Earthworm Jim</i>	Playmates	★★★
<i>Mobile Suit Gundam (Japan)</i>	Bandai	★★	<i>FIFA Soccer</i>	Electronic Arts	★★★★★
<i>Mortal Kombat 3</i>	Publisher	★★★	<i>F-1 Live Information</i>	Sega	★★★★
<i>Motor Toon GP (Japan)</i>	SCE	★★	<i>Galactic Attack</i>	Acclaim	★★★
<i>NBA Jam Tournament Edition</i>	Acclaim	★★★★	<i>Gotha (Japan)</i>	Sega	★★★
<i>NFL Gameday</i>	Sony Interactive	★★★★★	<i>Guardian Heroes (Japan)</i>	Sega	★★★
<i>NHL Face Off</i>	Sony Interactive	★★★★★	<i>Hang-On GP '95</i>	Sega	★★★
<i>PGA Tour Invitational '96</i>	Electronic Arts	★★★	<i>Hi-Octane</i>	EA	★★
<i>Philosoma</i>	SCE	★★	<i>High Velocity</i>	Atlus	★★★
<i>Power Serve 3-D Tennis</i>	Ocean	★★★	<i>Iron Storm</i>	Working Designs	★★★★★
<i>Power Baseball (Japan)</i>	Konami	★	<i>Johnny Bazookatone</i>	US Gold	★★★
<i>Raiden</i>	Seibu	★★	<i>Last Gladiators (Japan)</i>	Kaze Co	★★★★
<i>Rayman</i>	Ubisoft	★★★★	<i>Mansion of Hidden Souls</i>	Sega	★★★
<i>Resident Evil</i>	Capcom	★★★★★	<i>Mortal Kombat II</i>	Acclaim	★★★
<i>Ridge Racer</i>	Namco	★★★★	<i>Myst</i>	SunSoft	★★★
<i>Ridge Racer Revolution (Japan)</i>	Namco	★★	<i>NHL All-Star Hockey '96</i>	Sega	★★
<i>Road Rash</i>	Electronic Arts	★★★	<i>Nightwarriors: Darkstalkers Revenge</i>	Capcom	★★★
<i>Romance of the Three Kingdoms IV</i>	Koei	★★★	<i>Off-World Interceptor</i>	Crystal Dynamics	★★★
<i>Shockwave Assault</i>	Electronic Arts	★★	<i>Panzer Dragoon</i>	Sega	★★★★
<i>Sidewinder</i>	Asmic	★★★	<i>Pebble Beach Golf Links</i>	Sega	★★★
<i>Silverlode</i>	Vic Tokai	★★★★	<i>Riglord Saga (Japan)</i>	Sega	★★★
<i>Space Griffon</i>	Atlus	★★	<i>Quarterback Attack</i>	Digital Pictures	★★★
<i>Tekken</i>	Namco	★★★★	<i>Sega Rally Championship</i>	Sega	★★★★★
<i>Total Eclipse Turbo</i>	Crystal Dynamics	★★	<i>Skeleton Warriors</i>	Playmates	★★★
<i>Toukon Retsuden (Japan)</i>	Tomy	★★★★	<i>Shinobi Legions</i>	Sega	★★★
<i>Twisted Metal</i>	SIE	★★★★	<i>Shining Force</i>	Working Designs	★★★
<i>Viewpoint</i>	Electronic Arts	★	<i>SimCity</i>	Maxis	★★★
<i>Warhawk</i>	Sony Interactive	★★★★	<i>SteamGear Mash</i>	Takara (Japan)	★★
<i>Wipeout</i>	Psygnosis	★★★★★	<i>Street Fighter: The Movie</i>	Acclaim	★★★
<i>Worms</i>	Ocean	★★★★	<i>Tama (Japan)</i>	Tengen	★★
<i>WWF Wrestlemania</i>	Acclaim	★★★★	<i>Theme Park</i>	Electronic Arts	★★★
<i>X-Com: UFO Defense</i>	Microprose	★★★★★	<i>ThunderStrike 2</i>	US Gold	★★★★
<i>Zero Divide</i>	Zoom	★★★	<i>Virtua Cop</i>	Sega	★★★★
Saturn			<i>Virtua Fighter</i>	Sega	★★★★
<i>Astal</i>	Sega	★★★	<i>Virtua Fighter Remix</i>	Sega	★★★★★
<i>Battle Arena Toshinden</i>	Takara	★★★★	<i>Virtua Fighter 2</i>	Sega	★★★★★
<i>Battle Monster (Japan)</i>	Naxat Soft	★★	<i>Virtua Racing</i>	Time Warner	★★★
<i>Blackfire</i>	Sega	★★★	<i>Virtual Hydlide</i>	Atlus	★★
<i>Bug!</i>	Sega	★★★	<i>Virtual Volleyball (Japan)</i>	Imagineer	★
<i>Clockwork Knight</i>	Sega	★★★	<i>Wicked 18</i>	Vic Tokai	★★★
<i>Clockwork Knight 2 (Japan)</i>	Sega	★★★	<i>Wing Arms</i>	Sega	★★★
			<i>World Cup Golf: Pro' Edition</i>	US Gold	★★★

rating

TITLE	PUBLISHER	NG RATING	TITLE	PUBLISHER	NG RATING	TITLE	PUBLISHER	NG RATING
World Series Baseball	Sega	★★★★	Primal Rage	Time Warner	★★	Dragon	Atari	★★★
Worldwide Soccer	Sega	★★★	Quarantine	GameTek	★★★	Fever Pitch Soccer	Atari	★★★
X-Men: Children of the Atom	Capcom	★★★	Road Rash	EA	★★★★	Fight for Life	Atari	★★
3DO			Rebel Assault	Lucas Arts	★★	FlipOut!	Atari	★★★
Alone In The Dark 2	Interplay	★★★★	Samurai Shodown	Crystal Dynamics	★★★	Highlander	Atari	★★★
Battlesport	Studio 3DO	★★★★★	Scramble Cobra	Panasonic	★★	Hover Strike	Atari	★★
Bladeforce	Studio 3DO	★★★★★	Seal of the Pharaoh	Panasonic	★★	Iron Soldier	Atari	★★★
BC Racers	Goldstar	★	Shanghai: The Great Wall	Activision	★★★	I-War	Atari	★★
Burning Soldier	Panasonic	★★	Shock Wave	EA	★★	Missile Command 3D	Atari	★★
Bust a Move	Panasonic	★★★★	Starfighter	Studio 3DO	★★★★	Pitfall: The Mayan Adventures	Atari	★★★★
Cannon Fodder	Virgin	★★★★	Operation Jump Gate	EA	★★★	Power Drive Rally	Time Warner	★★★
Captain Quazar	Studio 3DO	★★	Slam 'N' Jam '95	Crystal Dynamics	★★★★	Rayman	Atari	★★★★
Crime Patrol	American Laser Games	★★	Soccer Kid	3DO	★★	Ruiner Pinball	Atari	★★★
Cyberdillo	Panasonic	★★	Space Hulk	EA	★★★★	Supercross 3D	Atari	★
Cyberia	Interplay	★★★	Space Pirates	American Laser Games	★★★	Syndicate	Ocean	★★★★
D	Panasonic	★★	Star Control II	Crystal Dynamics	★★★	Tempest 2000	Atari	★★★★
Deathkeep	SSI	★★★	Starblade	Panasonic	★★	Theme Park	Ocean	★★
Demolition Man	Virgin	★★	Station Invasion	Club 3DO	★★★	Troy Aikman Football	Williams	★★
Drug Wars	American Laser Games	★★	Super Street Fighter II Turbo	Panasonic	★★★★	Val d'Iserre Skiing	Atari	★★
Family Feud	GameTek	★★★	Super Wing Commander	Origin	★★★★	White Men Can't Jump	Trimark	★★★
Flying Nightmares	Domark	★★★	Supreme Warrior	Digital Pictures	★★	Wolfenstein 3-D	Atari	★★
FIFA International Soccer	EA	★★★★★	Syndicate	EA	★★★★	Zool 2	Atari	★★★
Flashback	U.S. Gold	★★★	The Daedalus Encounter	Panasonic	★★★	Zoop	Viacom	★★★
Gex	Crystal Dynamics	★★★★	The Last Bounty Hunter	American Laser Games	★★	32X		
Ghost Hunter	Matsushita	★★★	Theme Park	EA	★★	Brutal	Gametek	★★★
Guardian War	Panasonic	★★★	Trip'D	Wrap	★★★	Golf Magazine...Fred Couples	Sega	★★★
Hell: a Cyberpunk Thriller	GameTek	★★	VR Stalker	American Laser Games	★★★	Mortal Kombat II	Acclaim	★★★
Icebreaker	Magnet Interactive	★★★	Way of the Warrior	Universal Interactive	★★	Motocross Championship	Sega	★★★
Immercenary	EA	★★★	Wing Commander III	EA	★★★★★	NBA Jam Tournament Edition	Acclaim	★★★
Iron Angel of the Apocalypse	Panasonic	★★★	Wolfenstein 3-D	Id/Logicware	★★	Pitfall: The Mayan Adventures	Activision	★★★
Iron Angel: The Return	Panasonic	★★★	World Cup Golf	US Gold	★★	Quarterback Club	Acclaim	★★★
Jammit	Street Sports	★★	Zhadnost: The People's Party	Studio 3DO	★★★	Shadow Squadron	Sega	★★★
John Madden Football	EA	★★★★	Jaguar			Star Wars Arcade	Sega	★★★
Killing Time	Studio 3DO	★★★★	Alien vs. Predator	Atari	★★★★	Super Afterburner	Sega	★★★
Kingdom: The Far Reaches	Interplay	★★	Atari Karts	Atari	★★★	Super Space Harrier	Sega	★★★
Lemmings	Psygnosis	★★★★	Baldies CD	Atari	★★★	Virtua Fighter	Sega	★★★★
Lost Eden	Virgin Interactive	★★★★	Battlemorph	CD	★★★★	Virtua Racing Deluxe	Sega	★★★
Lucien's Quest	Panasonic	★	Blue Lightning CD	Atari	★★★	World Series Baseball	Sega	★★★★★
Mazer	American Laser Games	★	Brett Hull NHL Hockey	Atari	★★★	36 Great Holes	Sega	★★★
Mega Race	Mindscape	★★	Bubsy: Fractured Furry Tales	Atari	★★	<div>For your information</div> <div>Here's what the ratings signify:</div> <div>★★★★★ Revolutionary</div> <div>★★★★ Excellent</div> <div>★★★ Good</div> <div>★★ Average</div> <div>★ Bad</div>		
Microcosm	T&E Soft	★★	Burn Out	Atari	★★★			
Myst	Panasonic	★★	Cannon Fodder	Virgin Interactive	★★★★			
Off-World Interceptor	Crystal Dynamics	★★★	Checkered Flag	Atari	★★			
Need for Speed	EA	★★	Club Drive	Atari	★			
Panzer General	SSI	★★★★	Defender 2000	Atari	★★★			
PGA Tour Golf '96	EA Sports	★★★	Doom	Atari	★★★			
PO'ed	Any Channel	★★★★	Double Dragon V	Tradewest	★★			



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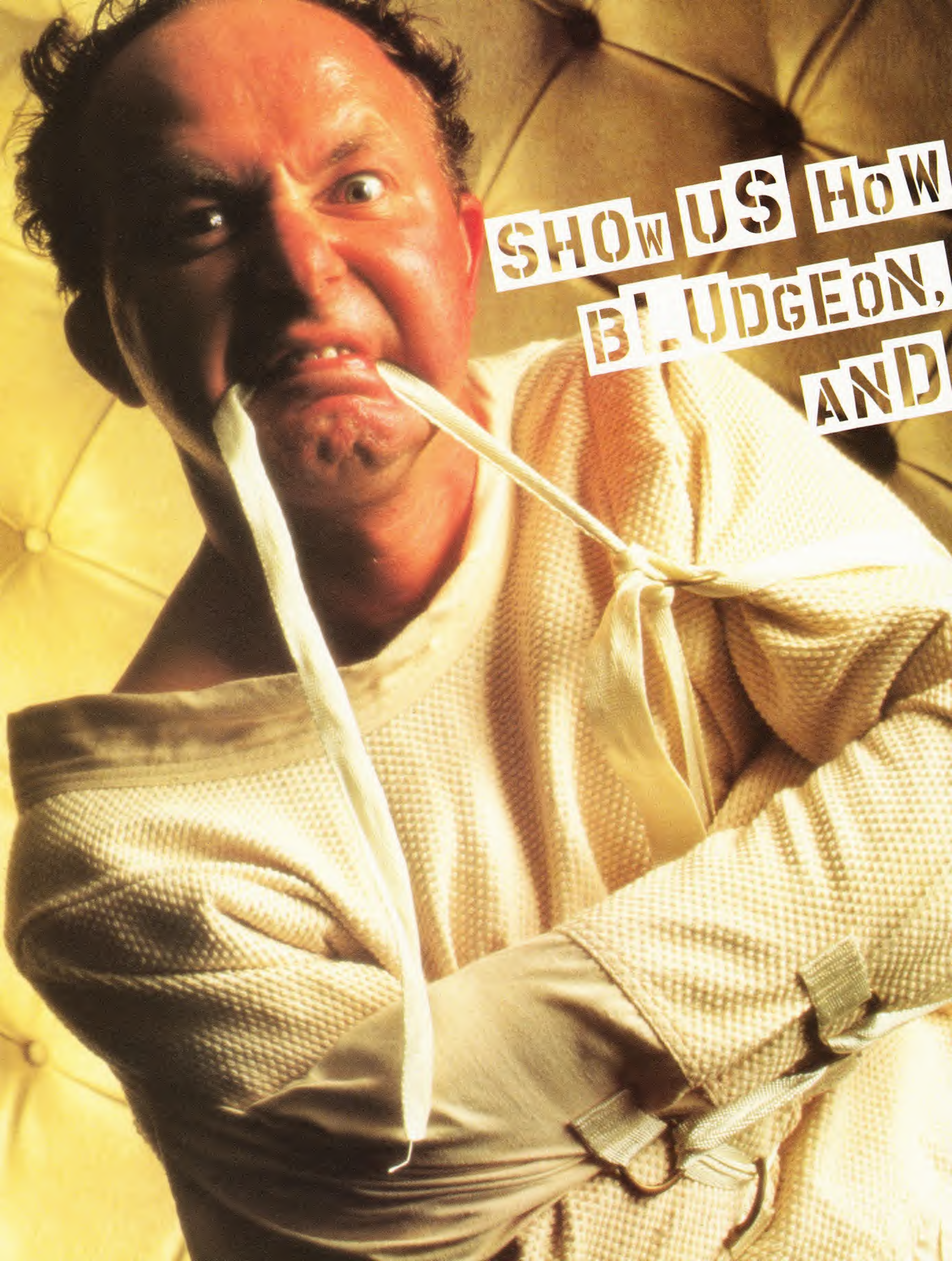
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ARTISTS:

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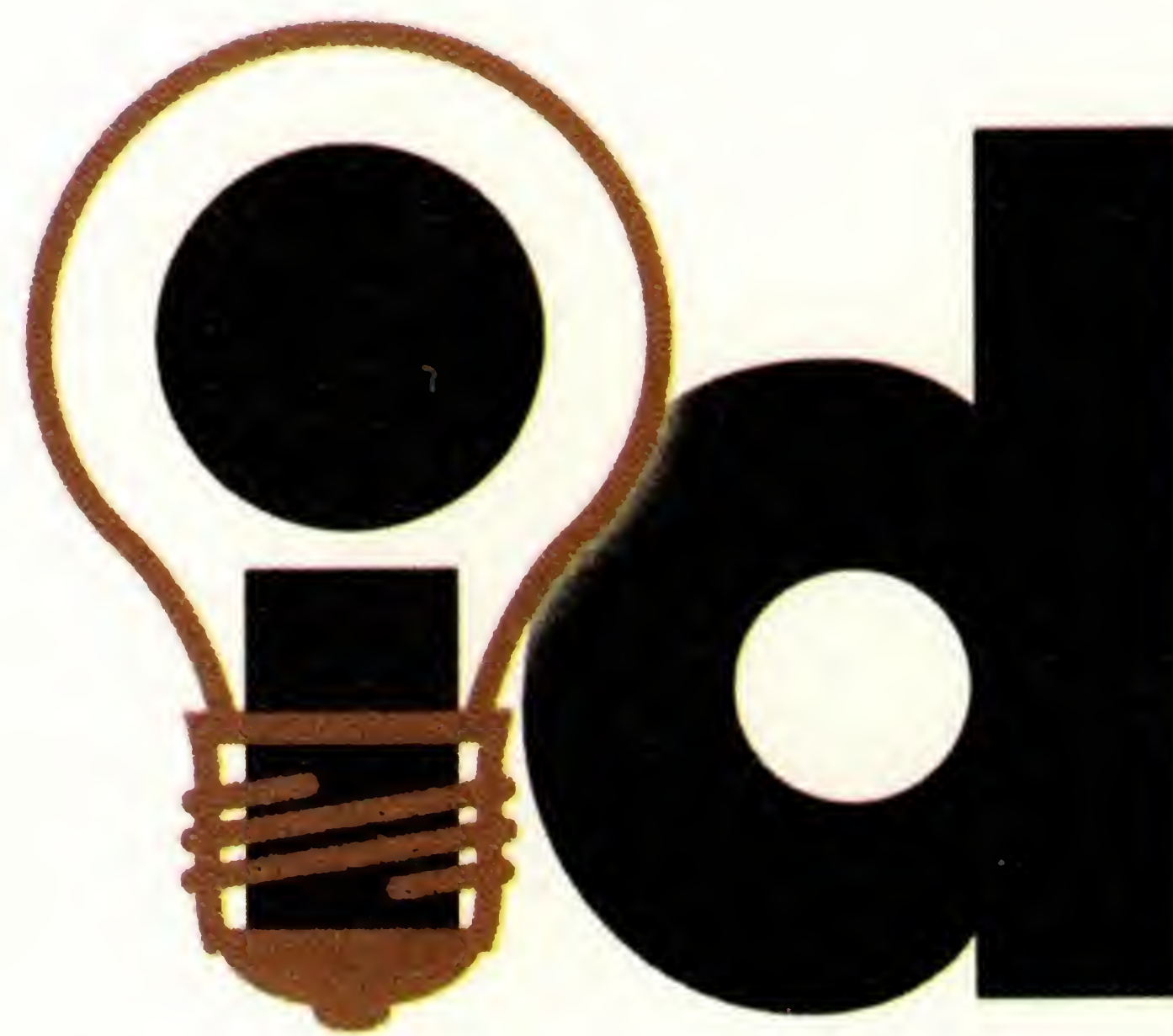
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Human writes

Not to sound like a nitpicker, but I found some things in your Lexicon [NG 15] that I felt I had to comment on. Here we go:

DRAM: VRAM is not the opposite of DRAM. The opposite of DRAM is SRAM, or Static RAM. Either DRAM or SRAM could be used for VRAM or basic RAM, but DRAM acts differently. The "Dynamic" refers to the fact that you have to dynamically refresh the information contained in it every few (milli)seconds, whereas "Static" RAM is exactly that, static, with no need to be refreshed. While in some ways that would be a huge drawback, as the refresh requires extra hardware, and occasionally fancy timing (to avoid normal RAM reads and writes), the advantage of DRAM over SRAM is that each bit of RAM is comprised of fewer transistors, and therefore is more compact and cheaper to boot.

Game Gear: From what I've heard, the Game Gear is not entirely compatible with the Master System. While you can play SMS games on a GG without a pin-out change, the opposite is not true, as the GG is slightly faster and can use more colors. What the effect of trying would be, I don't know (yet). This is a true nitpick, as it relies on how you define the word compatible. You're probably OK.

Joystick: A joystick does not have to have at least one button as the article stated. Or did *Pac-Man* not have a joystick?

Megabit: Ah, if I did my math right, a megabit is actually 128K, not 256K. If a bit is 1/8th of a byte, then a megabit is 1/8th of a megabyte. 1024K (1 megabyte)

divided by 8 equals 128K.

MegaDrive: Also the Japanese name for Sega Genesis.

Realtime: Another occasional definition of realtime, in gaming terms, is where things progress in a temporal sequence and have no bearing on whether the player's character is there to witness it or not. In other words, *Night Trap*, where things go on in other rooms even if you aren't watching, would be considered realtime.



The Lexicon brought in a lot of letters from a diverse readership

Second Party: A definition more analogous to the literary first-, second-, and third-person viewpoints would make second-party games those programmed by the users themselves. This definition dies in the face of needing a way to refer to "tied houses" like SquareSoft.

Now, just to make sure I don't sound like I know everything (which I can assure you I don't), I want more info about the MacOS for Genesis cartridge shown at Mac Hack. Who made that cart? Was it a hacker, or Apple itself?

Russ Perry, Jr.
Omro, WI

Something I see in all the magazines and quite a few other places that has always bothered me, not that

Next Gen is responsible, or the first, to make the mistake is that M.U.D. originally stood for Multi-User Database, not Dungeon. Back in the wee early years of M.U.D.s, they were actually used as a business tool, albeit briefly because of the difficult interface, which only a hacker could have loved. But it's something I think was due to be pointed out to "the powers that be."

Josh Zerlan
inaba@pixelation.com

I am writing to praise you on the gaming Lexicon in Issue 15. This truly informative and inventive piece of work proves once again that **Next Generation** is the best magazine out there. However, I do have a couple of comments.

In your definition of "scaling" you state that the Super NES had the ability in hardware to scale sprites. I thought that the Super NES could only scale backgrounds and that the programmers had to use certain tricks to make it look like it was scaling sprites (for example, the scaling Bowser in *Super Mario World* was really a background, hence the black regular "background").

I also liked how you placed "Ultra 64" next to "Vaporware." You should have saved some ink and just said "see above/below."

Joe Stepsis

What the hell was up with your definition of the Commodore 64 [Lexicon, NG 16]? I know you said no that there will be discussion on the subject, but really, you owe it to us. How could you screw up so badly in your definition of such a great

machine. What, did Steve Wozniak write the definition?

Brigid Willerer
Detroit, MI

Thanks for your comments and corrections, although yes, some of them are "nit-picky." We've received an amazing response about the Lexicon, and what has pleased us most has been that after scrutiny by some of the most technical people in the industry, only a few minor mistakes have been found. We plan on correcting the Lexicon before it is put online. Thanks also to everyone who has sent in additions for next year's edition.

In reference to the Commodore 64 definition, we would like to apologize to all the C64 faithful who we offended. We intended to let our resident Apple II chauvinist define the C64, and then let one of our Commodore people define the Apple II, which we thought would be funny. It probably would have been, too, if the Apple II definition had been done in the same style. Don't worry, we'll change the C64 definition in the online edition and future print editions of the Lexicon.

As for the MacOS/Genesis hack, it was definitely a non-Sega or Apple sponsored hack; you can read about it in the book "Late Night at MacHack."

I was wondering if you could please send me Nintendo's address so I can tell it how mad I am about waiting until September 30 for Nintendo 64's release. I'm really pissed off. I know you guys predicted that it would be held off until then, but I thought Howard Lincoln might be telling

corresponding

the truth. But no, he's full of shit! I am sick of waiting. I would have bought a PlayStation a long time ago if I knew this. The company shouldn't have even announced the N64 if it didn't have games ready. I work at a videogame store and I know at least 20 people who are changing their minds about N64 because they are also sick of waiting. I definitely don't blame them.

Jacob Chaplow
Palm Bay, FL

This is representative of the kind of letters we've received in the wake of Nintendo's most recent delay; currently the numbers are between four and five violently angry ones to each one that says, "Nintendo is doing the right thing; it's good that it's waiting until the software is ready; etc." To what extent this will affect Nintendo come September 30 is difficult to gauge, but it's unlikely it'll make a positive contribution. We'll see, but while we're on the subject of Nintendo...

Am I the only one who believes this or does anybody else besides me think that Nintendo 64 is just a glorified kiddie machine? Look at the games: *Buggy Boogie*, *Kirby Ball*, *Mario Kart*, etc. If I wanted to play kid's games I'd go to Chuck E. Cheese's. Before long, Nintendo will make an interactive Barney sing-a-long cart. I'm 25 and have more than enough money to buy a N64, but if Nintendo is going to make games primarily for toddlers, I'll just stick with PlayStation.

James D'Piazza
New Port Richey, FL

True enough, *Killer Instinct* notwithstanding, Nintendo is, and for that matter, always has positioned itself as the Disney of the game industry, resisting the aging of the game market with every fiber of its collective being. (Perhaps the high point of the Senate hearings on videogame violence was Howard Lincoln flatly stating that adults didn't play games.) Even when the games aren't overtly childish, nearly all the N64 games we've seen lack the hip, grittier edge of titles found on PlayStation and

Saturn. As a marketing strategy, aiming a \$250 console, \$80-plus carts, and an upcoming \$150 bulky drive add-on at a demographic, which couldn't possibly have the cash to afford it without help from Mommy and Daddy, seems shortsighted. The important fact to remember, however, was that the original *Mario Kart* and the 16-bit *Kirby's Dream Course* were each a complete blast, in spite of the fact they were overly cute. So yes, there's little reason to suspect their 64-bit updates should be any different — if you can get over the embarrassment of being seen playing them.

Isaw in your February issue that PlayStation is getting a type of VR headset made by Virtual I/O. Before I'd seen the same thing for computers, but it costs like \$800! Is the PlayStation headset going to cost that much? And how will it plug into the PlayStation? The controller ports? Also, will it have that sensory stuff so that you can turn your head and the game will turn like in a *Doom* game?

Jared Silva
Bedford, Texas

Virtual I/O is indeed producing a headset that will be PlayStation compatible, and should retail for about \$399. Don't get too happy yet because the unit, which resembles an oversized pair of eyeglasses, is basically identical to the set the market calls VTV, or Virtual Television, and plugs into the AV jacks in the back of PlayStation (the same ones you'd use to connect it to your TV or stereo). It's lightweight and works extremely well, but in general the image is 2D, and the effect is much like putting a large-screen TV right in front of your eyes. However, it is possible for the unit to produce a 3D image if the video signal going in is properly configured, and PlayStation can produce that kind of signal if the designers program for it. Virtual I/O also makes a model that supports head tracking for the PC market, which retails for \$599, but currently has no plans to adapt this for use with PlayStation.

I'm a loyal 3DO consumer, but the main reason I bought the system was in hope of M2. Now, it seems my hopes are fading. I've heard that it won't be coming out until the second half of this year. Will it be worth the wait?

Matt Oertli
San Antonio, TX

That depends on how long you're willing to wait. According to sources at Matsushita Japan, while the company still plans on having some form of M2 console available in Japan by the end of the year, we probably won't see a US release until at least mid-'97. The official story from Matsushita is that negotiations with Redwood City, CA-based 3DO over the rights to the technology took so long that game development is lagging behind, and third-party developers have only begun to be lined up. This doesn't exactly square up with what we've seen, since six months ago we ran at least two previews on upcoming M2 games, *Clayfighter 3* from Interplay and *Ironblood* from Take 2.

We know of at least one other title, a sequel to *D no Shokutaku*, plus a few more from Studio 3DO, the details of which are being kept quiet but which are definitely under development. Perhaps Matsushita is suffering from the same 64-bit curse that's been affecting Nintendo, but whatever the reason, it seems M2 is still a long way off.



Ironblood (NG 10) was one of the first M2 titles previewed

First, my compliments on a great article for folks interested in working in our industry. I think it will be a tremendous help to anyone who

needs some guidance for "breaking in" to the business.

One thing you might want to relay to your readers, though, is that there are opportunities to meet key contacts at game development companies. These opportunities take the form of local game developer meetings, shows, and conferences.

The Computer Game Developers' Association web page (<http://www.cgda.org>) has a listing of contacts for all local game developer meetings. There are often announcements of jobs available at the Bay Area and Austin meetings. Another option is to attend conferences, though these can be expensive. I would recommend the Job Fair at the Computer Game Developers' Conference and E³ as optimal for making industry contacts.

Ellen Guon
Illusion Machines Inc.
ellen@illusionmachines.com

This isn't the sole recommendation we've received — Jill Zinner of Premier Search, interviewed for the Advice from the Experts page in the same article, also mentioned it, as well as a few others. It is a great way to make contacts, but be aware, it also can be difficult to get your foot in the door, especially at conferences and trade shows — E³, for instance, is theoretically closed to the public.

Icouldn't help but notice that recently the number of pages in **NG** dropped dramatically. Why?

Jamie Bensonpeck
Los Angeles, CA

It's a simple case of revenue vs. expenses. There's a strict formula for determining the size of each issue by how many pages of ads are sold to cover printing costs. During winter and spring, hardware and game companies spend a lot less on advertising.

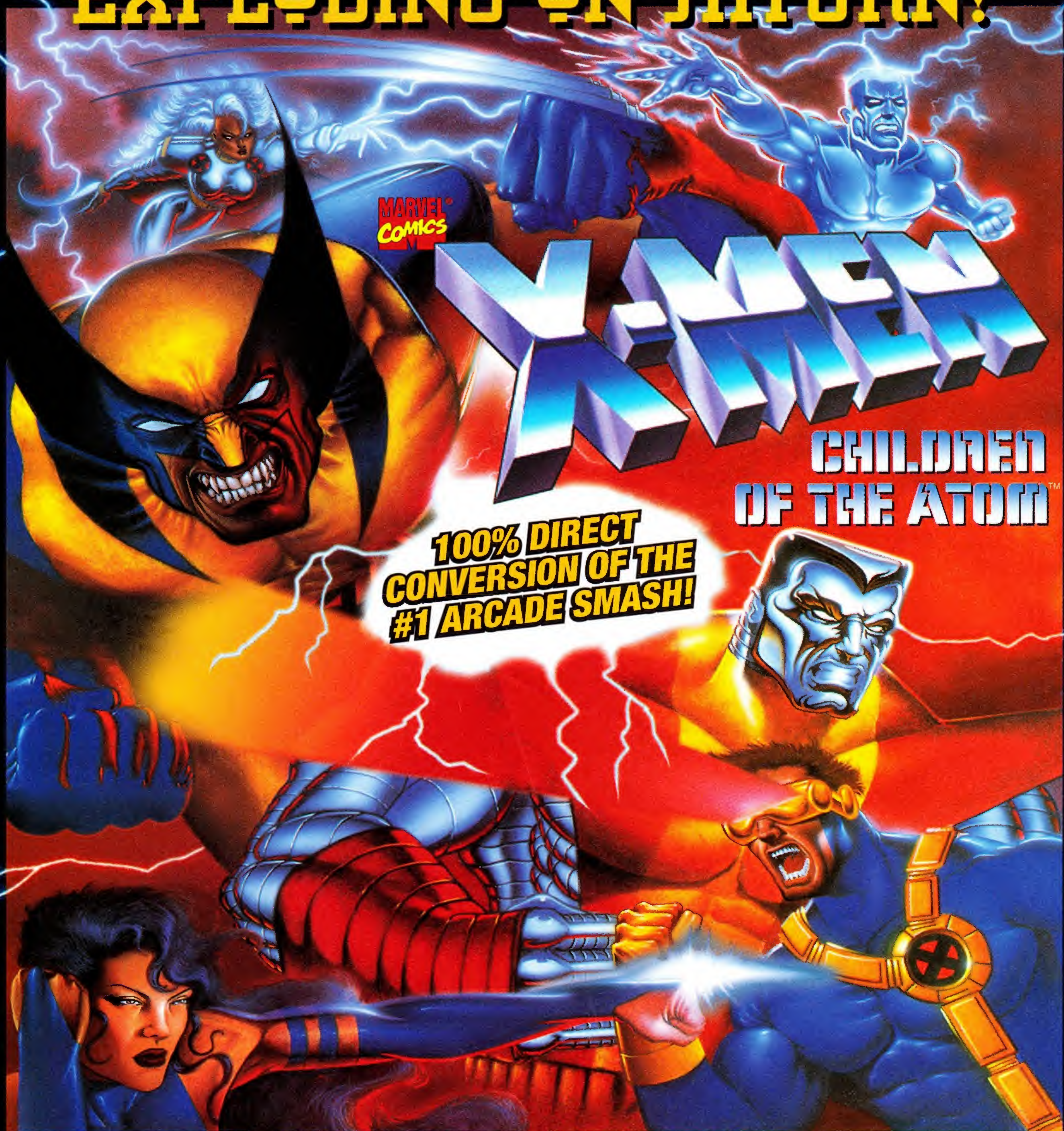
Thank you for your "How to get a job in the game industry" feature. I read it, applied to Sega, and now I have a job as a game tester.

John Hurth

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The way games ought to be...

Hi-octane game theory by **Chris Crawford**

The spotlight is a fickle lover. But of all the game designers who have basked in the glow of public praise, which ones are still around to reap the rewards today?

Over computer and videogaming's comparatively short history, many game developers have enjoyed popular adulation. But whereas there are many one-hit wonders who have basked temporarily in the limelight, only a few have managed to keep up the pace.

For every Peter Molyneux or Shigeru Miyamoto born from the 1980's computer game revolution, there are countless others who have never managed to turn their 15 minutes of fame into a lifetime of achievement. So what makes the difference between the two?

Leo Christopherson was one of the earliest computer game designers. He published *Android Nim* in late 1978. In terms of depth and substance, Leo's game was nothing to write home about: just plain old *Nim*. But its graphics were sensational. Leo turned the stacks sideways and replaced the static pieces with animated robots. Their little heads constantly moved back and forth, their eyes wandered, and they shifted stance. This was genuine animation on a TRS-80!

The reviewers went wild. This game was fabulous, it was magnificent, it was glorious. Leo basked in the approbation of the world. He was honored and admired.

And then, a grain of sand, a gust of wind, and Leo Christopherson was gone. He designed one or two more games, but they were straightforward repeats of *Android Nim*. People lost interest in his cute little animated games. I never heard anything more of Leo Christopherson.

Bob Bishop was one of the first Apple II programmers. He worked at Apple from the beginning and became one of the pioneers of graphics techniques on that machine. Bob used games to show off his graphics techniques. They weren't very impressive in terms of gameplay, but boy were they snazzy in the graphics

department. Bob's games did things that nobody had ever seen before.

Apple II owners loved his stuff. They bought everything he produced. They loved him. The magazines and reviewers gushed with praise. Awards showered down upon him. Bob Bishop was the darling of the Apple II community. And he was rich, too.

And then, a grain of sand, a gust of wind, and Bob Bishop was gone. His games were never much fun, and there were other games that offered more substance. Other people were learning some of Bob's tricks.

There is an uncountable number of grains of sand. The wind will never stop blowing. There are still those in our industry who follow the paths taken by these earlier stars. Some of them even now bask in acclaim and wealth

His work no longer had the same sizzle. Bob drifted away. I've heard that Bob is somewhere near Santa Cruz these days; I don't know what he's doing.

Nasir Gebelli picked up where Bob Bishop left off. Nasir developed advanced graphics techniques for the Apple II. He was fast and prolific, grinding out game after game on a time scale of months. An entire publisher, Sirius Software, was founded on Nasir's output. And what output it was! Nasir had developed dozens of tricks for squeezing the fastest animation out of

the Apple. His games boasted fast, full-screen animation that no one else's games could match.

Nasir Gebelli was an overnight sensation. He raked in the royalties; wealth was his in a matter of months. His games were on every store shelf; they were reviewed in glowing terms in every magazine. Nasir Gebelli was a one-man gold mine. A game need merely have the simple tag line "By Nasir" to be assured of massive sales figures.

And then, a grain of sand, a gust of wind, and Nasir Gebelli was gone. Sometime around 1983 or 1984, in the general collapse of the game industry and the specific collapse of Sirius software, Nasir Gebelli disappeared from the scene. I don't know where he is now.

Greg Christenson was a high school student when he burst upon the scene. Bright, shy, and quiet, Greg put together just one game: *Caverns of Mars* for the Atari. It was a simple vertical scrolling game, not too different from *Defender*. After all, Greg was only a high school student, new to programming, and using the Atari Assembler/Editor cartridge as his development tool. He really didn't know much about the game per se. He simply started with *Defender*, made it vertical, and then added interesting bits and pieces until he had a game.

But the graphics were fantastic. It used many of the graphics capabilities of the Atari, and the result was impressive. *Caverns of Mars* sold a zillion copies. Greg earned a ton of money. The press loved him. Here was a high school kid programming a hit game in just eight weeks. Talk about a Cinderella story! Atari gave him a \$25,000 award for the best game published by the Atari Program Exchange. Everybody wondered excitedly what this wunderkind would accomplish in coming years.

But then, a grain of sand, a gust of

wind, and Greg Christenson was gone. I don't know what ever became of Greg. He just disappeared from the game scene.

John Harris was another wunderkind. I remember he came to one of my training seminars for the Atari computers in 1981, but no other memories stand out in my mind. Only a year later, John unleashed *Jawbreakers* on the world. It was a *Pac-Man* clone, pure and simple. *Jawbreakers* was a beautiful game, better than the *Pac-Man* that Atari itself produced. It had lovely music, beautiful animation, great sound effects — everything about this game was excellent. Of course, the design itself was a complete nothingburger — it was just plain old *Pac-Man* with a few minor embellishments. But who cared when the graphics were so great?

Jawbreakers generated quite a legal row between Atari and Sierra, which had published the title. The legal battle dragged on for some months, ending in a pyrrhic victory for Sierra. John wrote another game for Sierra, I believe. He was profiled in Steven Levy's book *Hackers*, and there were, of course, the adulation and favorable reviews that go with creating a hit game.

But then, a grain of sand, a gust of wind, and John Harris was gone. I've been told that he went to work for an advertising company, but that was years ago.

Jonathan Gay and Mark Stephen Pierce were a hot pair. Together, they were responsible for *Dark Castle* and *Beyond Dark Castle*, two of the hottest Macintosh games ever created. The games could not boast much in the way of creativity: they were, after all, straightforward running, jumping, and climbing games.

But they bristled with animation and digitized sounds at a time when such things were considered sinfully luxurious. And Macintosh players loved these two games. They bought a huge number of copies, dumping bushels of money all over Silicon Beach Software. The two games collected every award around.

But now, a grain of sand, a gust of wind, and nothing is to be heard from Jonathan Gay and Mark Stephen Pierce. I don't know where they are now or what they're doing. One would have thought that after such great success, these two would go on to even greater things, creating even more sensational games, but that simply was not to be.

There is an uncountable number of grains of sand. The wind will never stop blowing. There are still those in our industry who follow the paths taken by these earlier stars. Some of them even now bask in acclaim and wealth.



Next Month



Nights

Yuji Naka was responsible for most of the innovations associated with Sega's landmark 16-bit hit, *Sonic the Hedgehog*. Can he repeat this performance in the next generation? The fate of Saturn could depend on it.

The first exclusive, in-depth look at Yuji Naka's *Nights*, next month in **Next Generation**.

Next Generation #19
on sale June 18, 1996

Clever readers have already subscribed. To find out how you can save cash and time, turn to page 32.

You can't just run away from your problems any more. From now on, you'll have to think on your feet.



Jumping, ducking and dodging have always been a critical part of any button-bashing Mario



adventure. But with the new Super

Mario RPG you'll also be pushing every brain cell

you've got. • That's right. You and the world's most



You'd never want to be on the bad side of your new pal Mallow. His thunderbolt Special Attack brings a blast of lightning down on any enemies in sight.

heroic plumber will have to battle through all the twists, turns and thumb-numbing action of a clas-

sic Mario adventure. Plus, meet

the mental challenge

as the story unfolds in

this fully-rendered role-playing game! • It's

the best of both worlds. One minute you're

neck and neck at the Yoshi Races. The next

you're gambling the night away at the

Grate Guy's Casino. And, in between, you'll

have to test your brains on mind-

mushing riddles and new action-

puzzles. Of course

you'll find plenty of

new friends who

can help out. But

they'll need your help

in return. Without you, Mallow

will never find his true family.

Geno will never become a real

boy. And Booster will never

find a bride. • You'll also



bump into all kinds of new bad-

dies, plus classic goons from every

Mario game in history. Only now,

they're rendered in ACM with a 3-D,

three-quarter overhead view. • So get ready

for all kinds of new Nintendo

action and brain-bending

Square Soft adventure.

Remember, running and

jumping is a great start.

But this time around

you'll also

need plenty of

brains to finish.



You want a new kind of Mario action? Try the Yoshi races. But here's a tip. If you don't hit the buttons to the beat, you'll get beat.



Whether you call it more action or more RPG, the fact is you'll have to use every trick in both books to beat these bad guys.



Finding Frogfucious is a wise move if you want to know more about your future quest.





There's a



biting,



clawing,



kicking
chill in the
night.

DARKSTALKERS

All the devastating
moves and powers
you've come to fear.
And more.



"I have great respect

for Microsoft.

But do they want to

eat my lunch?

Sure."

Howard Lincoln,

president, Nintendo of America

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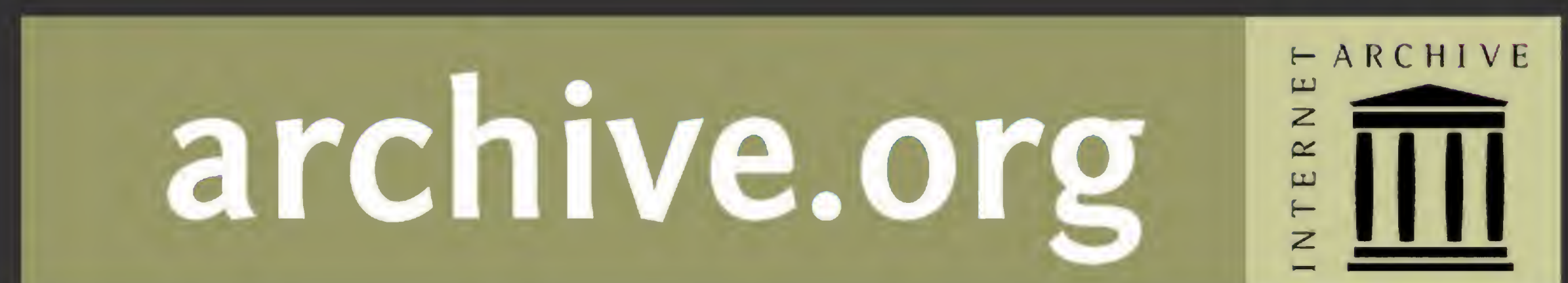


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